PARTISAN REVIEW

SPRING, 1939:

W. H. AUDEN
The Public v. W. B. Yeats

SIDNEY HOOK
Anatomy of the Popular Front

WALLACE STEVENS
Life on a Battleship

DELMORE SCHWARTZ
The Poet as Poet

ELISEO VIVAS
John Dewey's Philosophy

PHILIP RAHV
A Variety of Fiction

LOUIS MACNEICE
From an Autumn Journal

JAMES T. FARRELL
The Only Son

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS
Back to the City

•

Editorial:
WAR and the INTELLECTUALS

3

40c A COPY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If the paper you want must . . .

Uncover and fight the plans of the war-mongers

Discuss seriously and constructively Labor Unity

Present concretely the case for socialist economics and politics

Be in the forefront with the inside labor news

Urge unceasingly international solidarity against all imperialism

Oppose war, fascism and misery at home as well as abroad

Represent a collective effort for free discussion

Then the paper you want is

WORKERS AGE

Weekly Publication of the
Independent Labor League of America

Editor: WILL HERBERG

Editorial Board: Lyman Fraser, Jay Lovestone, M. S. Mautner, George F. Miles, Bertram D. Wolfe, Charles S. Zimmerman

Subscribe Now to WORKERS AGE

Rates: $1.50 a year, $.85 for six months
131 WEST 33rd STREET, NEW YORK CITY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PARTISAN REVIEW

A QUARTERLY OF LITERATURE AND MARXISM

VOLUME VI, No. 3 SPRING, 1939

COVER DESIGN		*T. J. Roszak*
THIS QUARTER	3	*D. M.*
POEMS	21	*Wallace Stevens*
WE RENTED TO THE LENINS	26	
THE ANATOMY OF THE POPULAR FRONT	29	*Sidney Hook*
WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS: 1865-1939		
THE PUBLIC V. THE LATE W. B. YEATS	46	*W. H. Auden*
THE POET AS POET	52	*Delmore Schwartz*
EXTRACT FROM AUTUMN JOURNAL	60	*Louis MacNeice*
ART CHRONICLE	62	*George L. K. Morris*
DRYBURGH ABBEY	64	*W. T. Scott*
THE ONLY SON	65	*James T. Farrell*
THE HANDS OF JEANNE-MARIE	76	*Arthur Rimbaud*
JOHN DEWEY'S ACHIEVEMENT	79	*Eliseo Vivas*
BACK TO THE CITY	92	*W. C. Williams*
PARIS LETTER	100	*Sean Niall*
A VARIETY OF FICTION	106	*Philip Rahv*
BOOKS		
Whitman and Arnold	114	*William Phillips*
The Poet's Responsibilities	117	*R. P. Blackmur*
A Belated Dialectician	120	*James Burnham*
The Pirenne Thesis	123	*Melvin J. Lasky*
Further Testimony	126	*George L. K. Morris*
LETTERS	127	

Editors: F. W. DUPEE, DWIGHT MACDONALD, GEORGE L. K. MORRIS, WILLIAM PHILLIPS, PHILIP RAHV. Business Manager: NANCY MACDONALD.

PARTISAN REVIEW is published at 539 East 88th Street, New York, N. Y. Please address mail to: Box 30, Station K, New York, N. Y.

PARTISAN REVIEW *is published quarterly. Subscription:* $1.25 *yearly; Canada,* $1.35; *other foreign countries,* $1.50. *Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes.* *Copyright May* 1939, *by* PARTISAN REVIEW. *Entered as second-class matter, November* 26, 1938, *at the post office at New York, N. Y. under the Act of March* 3, 1879.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Contributors:

WALLACE STEVENS is the author of *Harmonium, Ideas of Order,* and *The Man With the Blue Guitar.* . . . SIDNEY HOOK has contributed frequently to PARTISAN REVIEW. He is chairman of the department of philosophy at New York University. . . . W. H. AUDEN, the English poet, is now in the United States. His most recent work is the play, *On the Frontier,* written with Christopher Isherwood. . . . DELMORE SCHWARTZ's first book, *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities,* is reviewed in this issue. . . . LOUIS MACNEICE, who has published several volumes of verse and criticism, is now at work on a study of Yeats. His poem in this issue is part of a longer work which Faber & Faber of London will publish shortly. . . . WINFIELD TOWNLEY SCOTT is the author of *Biography for Traman,* a volume of verse. . . . JAMES T. FARRELL is, of course, the author of *Studs Lonigan;* he is at present working on the third volume of his new long novel. . . . LIONEL ABEL's translations of Rimbaud will appear shortly in a volume published by The Exiles Press. . . . ELISEO VIVAS teaches philosophy at the University of Wisconsin. He is an advisory editor of *The Kenyon Review.* . . . WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS's contribution is a chapter from the second volume of *White Mule.* . . . R. P. BLACKMUR is now writing a book on Henry Adams . . . . JAMES BURNHAM is an editor of *The New International.* . . . MELVIN J. LASKY is a young writer who lives in New York City.

IN COMING ISSUES:

I. A. Richards as Psychological Simpleton, by ALLEN TATE.

What Is Living and What Is Dead in Marxism, by SIDNEY HOOK.

The Americanism of Van Wyck Brooks, by F. W. DUPEE.

Conquered City, a story, by VICTOR SERGE.

Vernon Louis Parrington: a Study, by LIONEL TRILLING.

Thursday Morning Services: an Examination of The Nation and The New Republic, by DWIGHT MACDONALD.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This Quarter

WAR AND THE INTELLECTUALS: ACT TWO

TWENTY-TWO years ago, *The Seven Arts* printed Randolph Bourne's article, "The War and the Intellectuals." "To those of us who still retain an irreconcilable animus against war," Bourne wrote in 1917, "it has been a bitter experience to see the unanimity with which the American intellectuals have thrown their support to the use of war-technique in the crisis in which America found herself. Socialists, college professors, publicists, new-republicans, practitioners of literature, have vied with each other in confirming with their intellectual faith the collapse of neutrality and the riveting of the war-mind on a hundred million more of the world's people. And the intellectuals are not content with confirming our belligerent gesture. They are now complacently asserting that it was they who effectively willed it, against the hesitation and dim perception of the American democratic masses. A war made deliberately by intellectuals! . . . A war free from any taint of self-seeking, a war that will secure the triumph of democracy and internationalize the world! . . . Whence is our miraculous intuition of our moral spotlessness? Whence our confidence that history will not unravel huge economic and imperialist forces upon which our rationalizations float like bubbles? . . . Numbers of intelligent people who have never been stirred by the horrors of capitalistic peace at home were shaken out of their slumbers by the horrors of war in Belgium. Never having felt responsibility for labor wars and oppressed masses and excluded races at home, they had a large fund of idle emotional capital to invest in the oppressed nationalities and ravaged villages of Europe."

If "Belgium" be changed to "Czechoslovakia", these sentences apply as closely to American intellectuals in the spring of 1939 as they ever did in the spring of 1917. All sections of the intelligentsia are swinging in behind the New Deal in its drive towards a second world war to save democracy. The Communist Party, through its

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

League of American Writers, American Artists Congress, and other cultural organizations, gathers the leftish intellectuals into the war fold. Dorothy Thompson and Walter Lippmann shepherd the rightish intellectuals. The liberal weeklies, *The Nation* in particular, whose war line has become a scandal, see to it that the great middle bulk of the intelligentsia tread the path of righteousness. A whole crop of flag-waving, anti-fascist books springs up: *American Earth, The Stars and Stripes Forever, The Tree of Liberty, American Saga,* etcetera. Phi Beta Kappa "declares intellectual war" on the totalitarian nations. The brain-trusters in the capital have turned their attention from slum clearance to military aviation. Thomas Mann turns out flimsy propaganda tracts on the beauties of democracy and the horrors of fascism. And Van Wyck Brooks, of all people, proposes in a letter to *Time* that our reply to Hitler's book burnings should be a series of public bonfires of things Made In Germany.

"Now Is the Sword Drawn For Peace"

As Act Two of the tragi-comedy, "War and the Intellectuals", gets under weigh, it may be useful to look back a moment on Act One. In the very first week of the war, H. G. Wells wrote: "That trampling, drilling foolery in the heart of Europe that has arrested civilization and darkened the hopes of mankind for forty years — German imperialism and German militarism—has struck its inevitable blow. . . Never was a war so righteous as is the war against Germany. Now is the sword drawn for peace." His blood brothers across the Atlantic thrilled to the noble phrases. It would seem that *The New Republic* was founded to get us into the war, with, of course, the very best intentions. Its first issue, of November 7, 1914, carried a lead editorial: "The End of American Isolation." Before the year was out, it had developed the classic line, now being re-echoed by *The Nation* in Act Two: "A modern nation which wants the world to live in peace should not be content to keep the peace itself. It must be willing and ready, whenever a clear case can be made out against a disturber of the peace, to join with other nations in taking up arms against the malefactor." It was not long before the editors of *The New Republic* were promoting "The League to Enforce Peace", an international vision out of which the League of Nations was to grow. This became the holy grail of the liberal crusaders. Randolph Bourne wittily described *"The New Republic's* feast of eloquent idealism,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with its appealing harbingers of a cosmically efficacious and well-bred war."

When the Great Day finally came, and the nation was safely plunged into the war, *The New Republic* was ecstatic: "Mr. Wilson represents the best hope in the world. He can go ahead exultingly with the blessings of men and women upon him." The next issue carried the famous editorial, "Who Willed American Participation?" This is something special even in the annals of liberal foolishness. Those who opposed our entry into the war, it begins, are now somewhat bewildered. "They have seen a great democratic nation gradually forced into war, in spite of the manifest indifference or reluctance of the majority of its population. And they have rightly attributed the successful pressure to the ability of a small but influential minority to impose its will on the rest of the country." This minority is *not* the bankers and industrialists, who "have favored war without realizing the extent to which it would injure their interests." (The Nye Committee was twenty years in the future.) "The effective and decisive work on behalf of war has been accomplished by an entirely different class—a class which must be comprehensively but loosely described as 'the intellectuals.' The American nation is entering this war under the influence of a moral verdict rendered after the utmost deliberation by the more thoughtful members of the community.

Moral Controversy On the Western Front

It was a cardinal point of doctrine with the more thoughtful members of the community that our participation in the war was entirely disinterested. Reproving the corrupt Hearst yellow press for opposing the war because of "considerations of national egotism," *The New Republic* ended its editorial: "For the first time in history, a wholly independent nation has entered a great and costly war under the influence of ideas rather than immediate interests." And *The Nation,* which up to 1917 had been relatively sceptical about the Allied cause, editorialized, once the die had been cast for war: "All Americans must be glad that their President, in asking Congress to resolve that a state of war exists between the United States and Germany, called upon the nation to strengthen itself in high-minded purpose. Selfish ends he bids us put out of our minds. These are lofty sentiments." It is true that much is now known which was not public knowledge in 1917, but it was even then no secret that J. P. Morgan & Co. had floated vast loans in this country for the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Allies, and that our industrial boom was based on the huge Allied purchases of goods and munitions. One might have expected even liberal intellectuals to have suspected — for all their congenital idealism — a very materialistic nigger in the woodpile. Yet the economic implications of our entry into the war seem to have penetrated the consciousness only of that small band of radicalized intellectuals and artists who rallied behind *The Masses,* led by Max Eastman and John Reed, to carry on a witty and gallant fight against the war. Equally courageous, but romantic and politically naive, was the stand of *The Seven Arts,* the excellent literary magazine which was founded in 1916 by James Oppenheim, Waldo Frank, Van Wyck Brooks, and others. It printed Randolph Bourne and John Reed on the war question. But in the April, 1917, issue, the editors, accepting the "League to Enforce Peace" illusion, approved our entry into the war if the Administration held to its supposedly unselfish war aims. "We must begin, then, by disavowing that this is an action for America only." Even John Dewey could write of "the gallant fight for democracy and civilization fought on the soil of France". But the classic liberal formulation was made by the anonymous author of a National Security League pamphlet: "From 1914 to 1918," he wrote in the closing months of the war, "the world has had its greatest moral controversy."

Disenchantment

America had not been involved in the great moral controversy many months before a note of disillusion began to sound in the writings of the more thoughtful members of the community. "Willing war," Bourne had warned, "means willing all the evils that are organically bound up with it. A good many people still seem to believe in a peculiar kind of democratic and antiseptic war." A few months of war were enough to lead President Wilson from "peace without victory" to "The day has come when we must conquer or submit." *The Masses* was denied the use of the mails, Max Eastman narrowly escaped lynching by some soldiers, Eugene Debs and hundreds of Wobblies and Socialists were given severe prison terms, and in the early weeks of the great crusade for democracy, universal conscription was introduced. *The Seven Arts* soon discovered that the idealistic war it had hoped for was a fraud, and, when its editors courageously insisted on expressing their mounting objections, their financial backing was withdrawn and the magazine died. The liberal weeklies were less quixotic in giving voice to their disenchant-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment. They were shocked by the refusal of the State Department to give passports to the American delegation to the Socialist peace conference in Stockholm in 1917, especially since the United States was almost alone among the warring powers in this refusal. The episode was all the more disturbing since, as *The Nation* pointed out, the conference would probably not have the slightest effect on the war. In the first flush of its enthusiasm, *The New Republic* easily swallowed conscription, editorializing on April 14, 1917, that the volunteer system should be discarded because it was "inimical to liberty." But by the fall of the year, its editors were complaining that The League to Enforce Peace looked farther off than it had before war was declared.

Words, Words, Words

Today, as in 1917, the intellectuals have one set of war aims, the Administration they support, another. The intellectuals would rescue Western civilization from fascism and restore it to the ways of progress and democracy. Their government, however, as a serious capitalist enterprise, of necessity takes a less romantic view of the affair. *Its* aims are the destruction of a threatening competitor in world markets and the defense of a status quo, both international and domestic, which is greatly to the advantage of the ruling bourgeoisie. The intellectuals, in a word, want to crush fascism, the State Department thinks rather of Germany.

The intellectuals are very articulate about their war aims, which are idealistic and inspiring. When the State Department, for that very reason, publicly echoes these aims, the intellectuals conclude they are leading the world toward the light. A notable recent convert, for example, is Sumner Welles, Under-Secretary of State. A few years ago, Mr. Welles was so unenlightened as to journey in person to Cuba to make sure that the liberal Grau San Martin was safely replaced by his own—and the National City Bank's—candidate, Colonel Fulgencio Batista. But Mr. Welles' social consciousness, stimulated by recent events abroad, has developed so rapidly he now beats the editors of *The Nation* at their own game, as when he told us the other day that *all* the existing regimes in Latin America deserve our support because they are all, without exception, republics. This discovery greatly simplifies the tasks of the friends of democracy in Latin America.

For if the intellectuals provide their government with fine sentiments, the process also works the other way round. One might

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

think that a group whose chief occupation is writing would offer resistance to the wiles of language. It has not been so. As the savage hopefully calls the dreaded volcano "the blessed source of all good things", so the intellectual believes in the power of verbal formulae to sweeten the ghastliest realities. The last war would have been a dirty business were it not for those glowing phrases of Woodrow Wilson: "Self Determination of Nations . . . A People's War . . . Open Covenants Openly Arrived At . . . A World Safe for Democracy." Now once more we have in the White House a statesman who also knows well how to use that rhetoric of heart-warming abstractions and moral earnestness which attracts the intellectuals. The President speaks their language.

It is a mistake to consider such politicians simple hypocrites. Like Wilson before him, Roosevelt seems largely to share the high hopes and generous, naive illusions of his intellectual followers. This makes him all the more effective because of the value intellectuals attach to intentions. "By defining the issues of our struggle," writes Lewis Mumford in his tract for the times, *Men Must Act* (Harcourt, $1.50), "by projecting our purposes clearly, we may transform the character of our war." Two decades ago, Walter Lippmann, then an editor of *The New Republic,* saw a wonderful change come over the last war once democratic America had gone in. "We can dare to hope for things which we never dared to hope for in the past," he wrote in 1917, "That hope is nothing less than the Federation of the World. No other idea is big enough to describe the Alliance. It is no longer an offensive-defensive military agreement among diplomats. That is how it started, to be sure. But it has grown and is growing into a union of peoples determined to end forever the intriguing, adventurous nationalism which has torn the world for three centuries. . . The democracies are unloosed!" And only a few weeks ago, the historian, James Shotwell, could describe how the injection of Wilson's high purposes had meant "the transformation of the war from a meaningless carnage to a crusade that was 'to make the world safe for democracy'." The crusade flopped, but now we must try, try again. To quote Mr. Mumford on the last war: "What was wrong was not that we sought to preserve democracy; what alone was wrong was that we failed. . . That we did not gather the beneficent results of a democratic victory is not a proof of the notion that we were fooled or misguided when we sought to save democracy." What can one say?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Road to Hell

Let us grant the good intentions of Franklin D. Roosevelt. But the laws of motion of monopoly capitalism work themselves out, with brutal disregard for intentions, much the same under a Roosevelt as under a Coolidge. How can an Administration act in important matters contrary to those class interests of the dominant bourgeoisie which have shaped the American state, the American law and constitution? Their enormous mass throws its inertia against following new paths, impelling the republic with blind momentum along the historical path destined for it. The good intentions of Roosevelt simply make him the more dangerous, since he is the unwitting prisoner, along with his intellectual following, of capitalist necessity.

The contradiction between the concept of a war for democracy and what is actually taking place under that slogan has already begun to appear. The closer the second great crusade for democracy draws near, the feebler grow the forces of democracy inside the country; the more battleships, the lower the relief standards; the bolder the President's utterances against Hitler, the more conciliatory his attitude towards our own business rulers. The intellectuals will open their eyes some day, but not until it is too late. To quote a recent PARTISAN REVIEW editorial: "It would almost appear that the peculiar function of the intellectuals is to idealize imperialist wars when they come and to debunk them after they are over." At present, the intellectuals profess themselves to be quite mystified by the gaps that are already yawning wide in the war-for-democracy thesis. The failure of the President to raise the embargo on arms to Spain—which he himself had gotten Congress to impose—puzzled them very much. "Why do you not act, and act at once?" asked the editors of *The New Republic* as the Spanish republic went into its death agony. "Why did you not act long ago? We confess that your policy in this matter is a tragic mystery to us." Raising the embargo was the first step, and the only concrete one, in Lewis Mumford's fantastic "non-intercourse" program. Once the embargo was raised, he proposed that supplies be sent the Republicans at once "under the convoy of the American Navy." But the American Navy and its Commander-in-Chief went off to the annual war games instead. Mr. Mumford, also, was at a loss to explain the President's behavior, vaguely referring to "callous morals" and "a false sense of expediency." The mystification has been increased by the prompt recognition of the Franco

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

regime by the State Department—the same State Department that is championing democracy in South America.

For an understanding of these dark matters the intellectuals have only to look at what is going on in their own sphere. The reactionary nature of the coming war reveals itself in the effects on our culture of merely preparing for it. Tying themselves to the bourgeois war machine, the intellectuals have given up their privilege—and duty—of criticising ruling class values. The tide of chauvinistic exaltation of American democracy has reached such proportions as to sweep off his feet even a critic like Van Wyck Brooks, whose recent speech on "Writers and the Yankee Tradition" before the Connecticut branch of the Stalinized League of American Writers was a really tragic performance from the man who wrote *America's Coming of Age*. The liberal weeklies, which once devoted their main energies to exposing and protesting social injustice at home, have become more interested in demonstrating how much inferior fascist capitalism is to democratic capitalism. Left intellectuals are rallying to the defense of the British Empire, on the grounds that India is better off under British than it would be under German rule. But why shouldn't the Indians rule India? The intellectuals take such positions, it is true, with all sorts of mental reservations. Once the fascist menace is destroyed, then they will take up the old fight again. In politics, however, the mask molds the face. You become what you do and say; you don't become what your reservations are.

The Lady Vanishes

The great objection to the war program of the intellectuals is not so much that it will get us into a war—the bourgeoisie will decide *that* question for themselves, when the proper moment comes, without any help from *The Nation*—but that it is diverting us from the main task: to work with the masses for socialism, which alone can save our civilization. A crusade against fascism abroad means political and cultural submission to the ruling class at home. And so in all the current discussions on the war question, nothing is ever said about the revolutionary alternative to capitalism and its product, war. Social revolution is no longer thought about. The lady has vanished.

It is hard to realize how our thinking has changed. How distant they seem, those early years of the depression, when the bourgeoisie was demoralized and discredited, when the Soviet Union and social-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ism were in the forefront of every intellectual's consciousness! There has been a change in the weather. The success of fascist foreign policy, the unsuspected depths of decay and corruption in the Soviet Union, the failure of the New Deal's reformist program and its replacement with business "appeasement" and armaments, and, above all, the right-wing reaction that is still gaining ground throughout the nation—all this has struck dismay into the hearts of the intellectuals. In the hot blast of such world events, the tender shoots of socialism have withered. As those who suffer some great psychic shock sometimes develop amnesia, so the intellectuals, retreating to the solid base of bourgeois democracy, have forgotten the very idea of socialism.

And Up Pops The Devil

Socialism vanishes, and in its place there appears what can only be called "anti-fascist fascism." We can't defeat fascism, Lewis Mumford writes in the last chapter of *Men Must Act,* "merely by comfortably holding out the prospect of a few extra hours to dawdle in or a few extra comforts to ease the busy grind as democracy's highest reward. . . There is no creation without travail and sacrifice. . . That which the soldier gives with quiet desperation on the field of battle must become the commonplace of the day; every mechanic, every clerk, every farmer, every housewife, writer, scientist, artist, inventor, industrialist, businessman must dedicate himself to the larger tasks of upholding our democratic civilization: this, before he permits himself a second thought about his individual fortunes. . . Sacrifice, hard discipline, soldierlike devotion to duty at any cost of comfort or convenience—these are the conditions that life imposes upon us if we are to escape the degradations and brutalities that fascism seeks to make once more the common lot of mankind." It is all there—"sacrifice," "discipline", "soldierlike devotion", the appeal to all classes to give up "extra hours", "extra comforts" and such materialistic trifles—all the commonplaces of fascist rhetoric. The essential ingredient of all—the scapegoat for the sins of capitalism—Mr. Mumford finds in fascism itself.

If this regression in liberal thought is already apparent even before hostilities begin, what will happen once we go to war? I have described the wartime disenchantment of an older generation. But that was nothing compared to the awakening in store for our own intellectuals. For if there is one point that needs no laboring, it is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that a modern war cannot be fought without universal conscription, without outlawing strikes and shackling the unions, without suppressing all dissenting opinion and handing the national economy over to the ruling class. The Army's "M-Day" plans are well known. The first result of a war against foreign fascism will be the introduction of domestic dictatorship. The war party generally admits this, but thinks we can return to "normal" government after the war, just as we did in 1918. It is true that democratic forms were ultimately restored after the last war. But it is also true that the war fastened on the nation the rule of big business under Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover, and that it broke forever the old populist-agrarian revolt against monopoly capitalism. Our democratic capitalist system being today in a much more advanced stage of decomposition than it was in 1918, the next war may be expected to have even more drastic social consequences. However good the intentions of the war party and its liberal politicians, I think it unlikely, once war has introduced dictatorship that our rulers will be able to afford the luxury of a return to democratic government.

"But This War Is Different!"

A few of the more enthusiastic jitterbugs, notably Lewis Mumford, have by now come to swallow, for the second time, the myth that we fought the last war primarily to save democracy. The dog returns to his vomit. Most of them, however, still admit we went to war in 1917 for business reasons and that the results were disastrous. But *this* war, they insist, is different. The Soviet Union didn't exist in 1917. Its defense against fascist aggression must be a concern of all men of good will. Nor did Imperial Germany offer any such radical threat to democracy as does Nazi Germany. The fascist drive for world power must be stopped if social progress, and Western civilization itself, is to survive. To accomplish these great ends, they are willing to make a truce with our own ruling class and even to submit to wartime dictatorship over here.

Let us grant both these distinctions, and by no means only for the sake of argument! The question is, however, whether a second world war would destroy fascism and protect the Soviet Union. I do not think it would serve either end, in fact, quite the contrary. Perhaps I should add—considering the extreme novelty of such a position at the moment—that this is not a special "line" invented by myself. It is merely the result of applying the commonplaces of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Marxist political analysis to the present war situation, commonplaces so well forgotten as to assume an air of eccentricity in a discussion like this one.

The Workers' Fatherland—or The Kremlin?

It must be admitted that the defense of the Soviet Union plays little part in the calculations of large sections of the war party. *Men Must Act* ignores the question entirely, nor does the problem seem to be of much concern to Dorothy Thompson and Walter Lippmann. As a means of lining up the left intelligentsia, however, it has been manipulated by the Communist Party with its usual skill. But are we to defend the present regime in the Soviet Union? Or the October Revolution to the extent it is still symbolized by the Soviet Union? If the former, then we must support the American government in any war in which it is allied with Russia. But if one's concern is primarily with socialism, then one's course is less clear. It seems to me that the corrupt dictatorship which has arisen under Stalin is proof of the correctness of the insistence of Lenin and Trotsky that only the spread of the October Revolution to more advanced countries could preserve its gains inside Russia. Whether the Soviet Union is still entitled to be called "a workers' state" is a hard question. But certainly such elements of workers' power as still survive in the Soviet Union can best be supported by the workers taking power in other nations. The process of degeneration which has been going on in the last ten years inside Russia can only be arrested by pressure from victorious workers' revolutions in more advanced countries. The problem of social revolution is an international one. A socialist regime in this country would be the best possible guaranty that we will defend the Soviet Union — but, of course, as the workers' fatherland and not as the political base of the bureaucrats now occupying the Kremlin. To the extent the Soviet Union is a workers' state, to that extent it will not benefit from the strangling of the workers' movement in the democratic nations. The Russian masses cannot be defended by tying the American masses to the gunwheels of imperialism. The only perspective of such a policy is intensification of the Stalinist dictatorship, and the victory of fascism over here. Under our very eyes, indeed, the Communist Party in this country is transforming itself into one more cog in the mechanism of American imperialism—the better to defend the Workers' Fatherland!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Where Is The Enemy?

The major force that is pulling the intellectuals into the orbit of war, however, is not their sympathy for the Soviet Union but their fear and hatred of fascism. The Nazis march into Czechoslovakia, take over Memel, threaten momentarily to break through into Poland, Rumania, Hungary. Franco's military courts begin to work through the famous card index of two million political criminals. Italian troops overrun Albania and lap at the borders of Greece. The second world war may break out any day now, even before these paragraphs come off the press.

A war to save democracy from fascism. But what is fascism? Is it some strange fungus, originating God knows how or where, which is spreading its slow stain over the map of Europe, something which has developed quite outside the "democratic" system we live under? Is it an infection which can be quarantined by a cordon sanitaire of fire and steel drawn around Italy and Germany? To read the liberal weekies, one might think so. The only way to fight such a plague would indeed be to go to war against it, to conduct an Albigensian crusade with bell, book and candle (and machine gun!) against what John Strachey has called the great modern heresy.

Actually, fascism is something at once more comprehensible and more difficult to fight. It is born from within a bourgeois democratic society, as the Third Reich was born of the womb of the Weimar Republic, by the processes of social decay caused by the growing contradictions of monopoly capitalism. Radek once called it "the iron hoop with which the bourgeoisie tries to patch up the broken barrel of capitalism." When they can no longer maintain their dominance under the old forms of parliamentary democracy, with its civil liberties and its independent workers' organizations, when old-style competitive capitalism, with its chaotic markets and lack of central planning, no longer meets their economic problems—then the bourgeoisie try to freeze fast their rule in the rigid forms of totalitarianism. When and if fascism comes to this country, it will be because the internal contradictions of capitalism have reached a point where they can only be—temporarily—controlled within its iron hoop. The only force that can turn us aside from that road is social revolution. "The main enemy is within our own borders."

"Every war is a defeated revolution," writes Trotsky. The intellectuals and politicians of the left are even now preparing to throw away, just as their prototypes did in the Europe of 1914-18,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the one great chance for successful revolution. The next war will be an orgy of slaughter and destruction compared to which the last war will seem idyllic. If the masses, and their leaders, fail to take advantage of the difficulties of their rulers then, if they fail to rise up and wipe out forever the whole bloodstained system, the future is black indeed.*

For the next war, as for the last, Lenin's is the only possible slogan for all who pretend to be on the side of the masses: "Turn the imperialist war into civil war!" To support the ruling class precisely when it most needs support will be to throw away the golden opportunity, to lose perhaps the very last chance that will be offered our civilization.

And for what? There is one way in which the coming war is indeed different from the last one. In 1917 the intellectuals justified our entry with visions of The League to Enforce Peace, the Parliament of Man, the War to End Wars. World capitalism has reached a state of decay today so terrible that it is no longer possible, even for liberal intellectuals, to cherish such illusions. No grandiose dreams of world brotherhood are floating about these days, not with the League of Nations given twenty-four hours' notice to leave Switzerland in case of war. *This* war is a purely defensive action from which its most ardent promoters hope for nothing more than a respite from fascism.** Far from being a crusade for a new world order, the coming war is at best an effort to turn the clock back and restore that fine old world order which the last war was fought to abolish.

And so there is in the copious writings of the war party a vast silence on the question as to what will happen once Hitler is crushed. They are well advised not to speculate too closely. I can see only two possibilities. Either another Weimar Republic will arise, to give way even more quickly to another fascist regime, since there seems little doubt that the next peace terms will be even more Draconian than Versailles. Or a revolution may put a workers' government in power. Is it conceivable that the democracies will not intervene to

*Certain of the war party—notably Professor Harold Laski—argue that collective security will prevent war. But if war somehow does break out, and if it is conducted in an "undemocratic" fashion, these hopeful ones say: we will lead the masses against their government. But they will find it impossible to accompany the bourgeoisie along every step of the road to war and then, at the threshold, politely to excuse themselves. Should they really attempt such a maneuver, they will find themselves hopelessly compromised with the masses, whose simpler mental processes cannot distinguish between supporting a war policy and supporting the war to which it leads.

**Mr. Mumford now justifies the *last* war on this ground, pointing out it gained us "a breathing space," since "Germany's assault on democracy was staved off for another twenty years." A system that needs periodic world wars as an oxygen tent might well be allowed to breathe its last.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

put this down by force of arms? Wilson sent American regiments into Russia to attempt to overthrow the Bolsheviks. The trump card in the hands of the Social Democratic executioners of the German revolution was the open threat of intervention by the Allied armies. And how can capitalist democracies act otherwise, since revolution is as much a threat to them as to the fascist regimes? If the war ends in revolution in the fascist nations, a new war will begin, with the positions ironically reversed: a war of intervention by the fascisized democracies against the new revolutionary governments. One can already hear the cries of "Betrayal!" that will arise from the intellectuals.

The Isolationists

There is, of course, a peace as well as a war party among the intellectuals. Very much in a minority even before Munich, the isolationists see their following drop away with each new fascist coup. But the tendency continues to exist, and must be taken into brief account here. Its chief tracts for the times are Stuart Chase's *The New Western Front* (Harcourt, $1.50) and the more elaborate *Save America First* (Harpers, $3.75) by Jerome Frank, of the Monopoly Committee and the Securities and Exchange Commission. The literary tone of these works is significant. Chase writes in a jaunty, Time-Marches-*On!* manner, Frank in the loose, commonplace style of the professional conversationalist he is. Compared to the portentous accents of a Mann or even a Mumford, these authors appear as prosaic and even rather vulgar fellows, writing in journalistic shirtsleeves, with little grasp of the broader aspects of the question of fascism. Mumford deals in "freedom" and "culture" and "civilization", Chase in "common sense" and those two potent totems, "The Facts" and "The Figures." If the jitterbugs soar too far above earthbound economics, if they are Hegelian in their idealism, the isolationists—who might be correspondingly named "earthworms"—recall those unimaginative, parochial English materialists whom Marx baited when he was not busy with the Hegelians.

The isolationists, in a word, are rather too simpleminded. Because they have little difficulty in showing that war and imperialism don't "pay", they reasonably conclude we should stay home and cultivate our own garden. All too reasonably, indeed, since capitalism is a means of keeping a ruling class in power, and not a rational social structure. They add up our national resources in long columns and present us triumphantly with the imposing total, as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

though imperialism were all a matter of book-keeping. But they conveniently forget that, if war and colonies don't "pay", neither does the home market that looks so fine in their ledgers. And it is just in the crucial matter of how to make our domestic policy work that the isolationists break down disastrously. Jerome Frank has nothing more concrete to offer than "a new spirit of cooperation" implemented by some arrangement "by which several industries meet, and confer, and work with one another and the government on their price and production schedules." This is "the old crap" of N.R.A. all over again, and the sort of cooperation business will expect, and get, is the kind the kid gives to the tiger when it doesn't struggle too vigorously. Stuart Chase devotes only one chapter of his book to the question of what American capitalism can do if it doesn't go to war. His proposals, also extremely vague, are for some sort of credit and inflation panacea. Having successively cried aloud in the wilderness the coming of technocracy, consumer cooperation, soil conservation, and semantics, Stuart the Baptist seems to be discovering a brand-new savior: Major Douglas.

If our problems would yield to the simpleminded rationalistic analysis the isolationists apply to them, we should not be in the mess we are in today. Their calculations, however, are upset by their failure to take into account the factor which makes any capitalist society a dynamic tension of class forces, the key to which is neither book-keeping nor technology but power politics. Just as much as the war party, the isolationists think in classless terms, refusing to admit the existence of the class struggle. And so both fail to understand that the war drive is primarily a matter of domestic rather than foreign policy. The Administration is trying to export the class war to the Rhine and the Mediterranean. It is true, says the President with his famous smile, ten million of you are unemployed and we've had to cut relief payments, but just think what social progress we'll make once we've rid ourselves of those monsters in black and brown shirts three thousand miles across the Atlantic! The isolationists, indeed, are a shade less sophisticated than the jitterbugs. They not only fail to grasp the dynamics of the war drive, but as an alternative they offer nothing but the same sort of timid reformism that has so clearly failed to solve the problems of American capitalism—whose failure, in fact, is precisely the reason the New Deal is now turning to war. The jitterbugs at least recognize that the reformist jig is up, and that war is the only perspective left for our capitalism.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And in this recognition, they follow the lead of the most inspired capitalist politician of several generations.

The Great Conspiracy

So long as modern war is regarded merely as a matter of one nation fighting another, it will be impossible either to understand it or to intelligently oppose it. Whatever may be said of past wars, the last world war "settled" nothing, even among the capitalist bandits who promoted it: the same opposing sides are about to tear each other apart once more and for essentially the same reasons. Whichever side wins will impose a new Versailles on the loser, and the *third* world war will begin to grow before the ink is dry on the treaty. Imperialist aims are still of major importance, but modern warfare must also be regarded as the chief instrument whereby the obsolete bourgeoisie maintain their death-grip on the social order. "The great error of nearly all studies of war," writes Simone Weill in a remarkable article published in *International Review* last year, "an error into which all socialists have fallen, has been to consider war as an episode in foreign politics, when it is especially an act of interior politics, and the most atrocious act of all." Her development of this idea seems to me to open wide and novel perspectives on the war question. "Marx has shown forcefully, she writes, "that the modern method of production consists essentially of the subordination of the workers to the instruments of labor, which are disposed of by those who do not work. He has shown how competition, knowing no other weapon than the exploitation of the workers, is transformed into a struggle of each employer against his own workmen and, in the last analysis, of the entire class of employers against their employees.

"In the same way, war in our days is distinguished by the subordination of the combatants to the instruments of combat, and the armaments, the true heroes of modern warfare, as well as the men dedicated to their service, are directed by those who do not fight. And since this directing apparatus has no other way of fighting the enemy than by sending its own soldiers, under compulsion, to their death—the war of one state against another state resolves itself into a war of the state and the military apparatus against its own army.

"War in the last analysis appears as a struggle led by all the state apparatuses and their general staffs against all men old enough and able to bear arms. . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Great Spree

Why should a Marxist analysis like this be so alien to the way of thinking of our intellectuals? They sincerely abhor war and believe themselves to be on the side of the people. They are moved by a high-minded concern for the future of civilization. And yet they are blindly playing the game of the chief enemies of both civilization and the people. Their moral indignation is turned against a scapegoat fascism across the ocean, to defeat which they are making common cause with the class and the economic system which in this country right under their very noses is preparing the next world slaughter. The explanation is to be found in the peculiar relationship of the intelligentsia to the class struggle. They conceive of their own thinking as being disinterested, free from class loyalties, taking as its referent "society in general." In a sense, this is true. They have not the direct economic interest in one side or the other of the class war which the proletariat and the big bourgeoisie have. But in a deeper sense, they deceive themselves. Like the petty bourgeoisie which produces most of them, the intellectuals shift back and forth between the two polar antagonists, attaching themselves to whichever at the moment seems to be the stronger. In times of severe capitalist crisis, when the authority of the ruling bourgeoisie is shaken, the intellectuals swing towards the workers. But since the bourgeoisie are usually very much in the ascendant, the intellectuals generally think in its terms. So today, they follow along after the bourgeoisie towards war.

Indeed, one finds them right now considerably in advance of their leaders. When Congress refused to fortify the island of Guam and thus advance our Pacific line of "defense" some two thousand miles closer to Japan, the *N. Y. Herald-Tribune* received the bad news calmly enough, but the *Daily Worker* ran indignant headlines about fascist-minded saboteurs. War is a serious matter for the workers, who will have to die. It is also a serious matter, a point one tends to forget, for the bankers and industrialists, who hesitate to commit their vast properties to the hazards of war. The intellectuals have comparatively little social responsibility: in a war they will risk neither their property, which is generally not great, nor their skulls, which are more valuable behind the lines. And so they can afford the luxury of disinterested moral judgments. It was *The Nation* which thought the President's jingoistic opening message to the present Congress "rang out like a bugle across the world to rally the dispirited and retreating democracies to a stand." It was left to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Commercial and Financial Chronicle to point out that in his message, the President "failed to indicate that whatever those countries [i.e., Germany and Italy] formerly could boast of freedom and tolerance were destroyed from within, and not from without." The *Chronicle* concluded its quasi-Marxist analysis: "Nor was any reference made to the complete improbability of an attack by any or all of those aggressor governments upon the United States, or to the even more remote contingency of success in any foreign attack so long as the liberties left us by our own government are worth fighting for and preserving."

The American intellectuals are off again on a moral spree. They will come to their senses in the cold grey dawn of a war-torn world, and they will experience again what Rosa Luxemburg in 1916 wrote in the "Junius Pamphlet":

"The show is over. The curtain has fallen on trains filled with reservists, as they pull out amid the cries of enthusiastic maidens. . . Into the disillusioned atmosphere of pale daylight there rings a different chorus: the hoarse croak of the hawks and hyenas of the battlefield. Ten thousand tents, guaranteed according to specifications, one hundred thousand kilos of bacon, cocoa powder, coffee substitute, cash on immediate delivery, shrapnel, drills, ammunition bags, marriage bureaus for war widows, leather belts, war orders—serious propositions only considered. And the cannon fodder that was loaded upon the trains in August and September is rotting on the battlefields of Belgium and the Vosges, while profits are springing, like weeds, from the fields of the dead. . .

"Shamed, dishonored, wading in blood and dripping with filth, thus capitalist society stands. Not as we usually see it, playing the roles of peace and righteousness, of order, of philosophy, of ethics, but as a roaring beast, as an orgy of anarchy, as a pestilence devastating culture and humanity — so it appears in all its hideous nakedness."

D. M.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Poems

Wallace Stevens

THE WOMAN THAT HAD MORE BABIES THAN THAT

I

An acrobat on the border of the sea
Observed the waves, the rising and the swell
And the first line spreading up the beach; again,
The rising and the swell, the preparation
And the first line foaming over the sand; again,
The rising and the swell, the first line's glitter,
Like a dancer's skirt, flung round and settling down.
This was repeated day by day. The waves
Were mechanical, muscular. They never changed,
They never stopped, a repetition repeated
Continually— There is a woman has had
More babies than that. The merely revolving wheel
Returns and returns, along the dry, salt shore.
There is a mother whose children need more than that.
She is not the mother of landscapes but of those
That question the repetition on the shore,
Listening to the whole sea for a sound
Of more or less, ascetically sated
By amical tones.
The acrobat observed
The universal machine. There he perceived
The need for a thesis, a music constant to move.

II

Berceuse, transatlantic. The children are men, old men,
Who, when they think and speak of the central man,
Of the humming of the central man, the whole sound

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Of the sea, the central humming of the sea,
Are old men breathed on by a maternal voice,
Children and old men and philosophers,
Bald heads with their mother's voice still in their ears.
The self is a cloister full of remembered sounds
And of sounds so far forgotten, like her voice,
That they return unrecognized. The self
Detects the sound of a voice that doubles its own,
In the images of desire, the forms that speak,
The ideas that come to it with a sense of speech.
The old men, the philosophers, are haunted by that
Maternal voice, the explanation at night.
They are more than parts of the universal machine.
Their need in solitude: that is the need,
The desire, for the fiery lullaby.

III

If her head
Stood on a plain of marble, high and cold;
If her eyes were chinks in which the sparrows built;
If she was deaf with falling grass in her ears—
But there is more than a marble, massive head.
They find her in the crackling summer night,
In the *Duft* of towns, beside a window, beside
A lamp, in a day of the week, the time before spring,
A manner of walking, yellow fruit, a house,
A street. She has a supernatural head.
On her lips familiar words become the words
Of an elevation, an elixir of the whole.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LIFE ON A BATTLESHIP

I

The rape of the bourgeoisie accomplished, the men
Returned on board *The Masculine.* That night,
The captain said,
"The war between classes is
A p r e l i m i n a r y, a provincial phase,
Of the war between individuals. In time,
When earth has become a paradise, it will be
A paradise full of assassins. Suppose I seize
The ship, make it my own and, bit by bit,
Seize yards and docks, machinery and men,
As others have, and then, unlike the others,
Instead of building ships, in numbers, build
A single ship, a cloud on the sea, the largest
Possible machine, a divinity of steel,
Of which I am captain. Given what I intend,
The ship would become the centre of the world.
My cabin as the centre of the ship and I
As the centre of the cabin, the centre of
The divinity, the divinity's mind, the mind
Of the world would have only to ring and ft!
It would be done. If, only to please myself,
I said that men should wear stone masks and, to make
The word respected, fired ten thousand guns
In mid-Atlantic, bellowing, to command,
It would be done. And once the thing was done,
Once the assassins wore stone masks and did
As I wished, once they fell backward when my breath
Blew against them or bowed from the hips, when I turned
My head, the sorrow of the world, except
As man is natural, would be at an end."

II

So posed, the captain drafted rules of the world,
R e g u l a e m u n d i, as apprentice of
Descartes:
First. The grand simplifications reduce
Themselves to one.
Of this the Captain said,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It is a lesser law than the one itself,
Unless it is the one itself, or unless
The Masculine, much magnified, that cloud
On the sea, is both law and evidence in one,
As the final simplification is meant to be.
It is clear that it is not a moral law.
It appears to be what there is of life compressed
Into its own illustration, a divinity
Like any other, rex by right of the crown,
The jewels in his beard, the mystic wand,
And imperator because of death to oppose
The illustrious arms, the symbolic horns, the red
For battle, the purple for victory. But if
It is the absolute why must it be
This immemorial grandiose, why not
A cockle-shell, a trivial emblem great
With its final force, a thing invincible
In more than phrase? There's the true masculine,
The spirit's ring and seal, the naked heart."
It was a rabbi's question. Let the rabbis reply.
It implies a flaw in the battleship, a defeat
As of a make-believe.

III

Second. The part
Is the equal of the whole.
The captain said,
"The ephebi say that there is only the whole,
The race, the nation, the state. But society
Is a phase. We approach a society
Without a society, the politicians
Gone, as in Calypso's isle or in Citare,
Where I or one or the part is the equal of
The whole. The sound of a dozen orchestras
May rush to extinguish the theme, the basses thump
And the fiddles smack, the horns yahoo, the flutes
Strike fire, but the part is the equal of the whole,
Unless society is a mystical mass.
This is a thing to twang a philosopher's sleep,
A vacuum for the dozen orchestras
To fill, the grindstone of antiquest time,
Breakfast in Paris, music and madness and mud,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The perspective squirming as it tries to take
A shape, the vista twisted and burning, a thing
Kicked through the roof, caressed by the river-side.
On *The Masculine* one asserts and fires the guns.
But one lives to think of this growing, this pushing life,
The vine, at the roots, this vine of Key West, splurging,
Covered one morning with blue, one morning with white,
Coming from the East, forcing itself to the West,
The jungle of tropical part and tropical whole."

IV

The first and second rules are reconciled
In a third: The whole cannot exist without
The parts. Thus: Out of the number of his thoughts
The thinker knows. The gunman of the commune
Kills the commune.
Captain, high captain, how is it, now,
With our affair, our destiny, our hash?
Your guns are not rhapsodic strophes, red
And true. The good, the strength, the sceptre moves
From constable to god, from earth to air,
The circle of the sceptre growing large
And larger as it moves, moving toward
A hand that fails to seize it. High captain, the grand
Simplifications approach but do not touch
The ultimate one, though they are parts of it.
Without them it could not exist. That's our affair,
That's this grandiose battleship of yours and your
Regulae mundi . . . That much is out of the way.
If the sceptre returns to earth, still moving, still
Precious from the region of the hand, still bright
With saintly imagination and the stains
Of martyrs, to be arrogant in our need,
It will be all we have. Our fate is our own:
Our good, from this the rhapsodic strophes flow,
Through prophets and succeeding prophets, whose prophecies
Grow large and larger. Our fate is our own. The hand,
It must be the hand of one, it must be the hand
Of a man, that seizes our strength, will seize it to be
Merely the sceptre over long desire,
Merely the centre of a circle, spread
To the final full, an end without rhetoric.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We Rented to the Lenins

Editors' Note: The following reminiscences are by the Swiss cobbler in whose house in Zürich the Lenins were paying guests in 1917. *They were first published in Schweizer Spiegel, a Swiss magazine. The translation is by Gertrude Barnes Fiertz. We feel that the recent death of Krupskaya—who here appears as "Mrs. Lenin"—lends special interest to these naive and shrewd comments on the Lenins' domestic life.*

"So, MR. KAMMERER, now there's going to be peace!" Mr. Lenin told me a few days before he traveled to Russia. That was in 1917 just before I moved from the Spiegelgasse to the Culmannstrasse. He wanted to come along too but if he could travel to Russia. he would not go to the Culmannstrasse, he had said. The Lenins too had everything packed, and were ready while we were moving. Only they did not know whether they would go to Russia or to the Culmannstrasse. Then he did get his transit permit, went suddenly to Bern and from there in the sealed car directly to Russia.

I had always liked him. He stayed with me for a year and a half. He lived in a room with his wife, and paid twenty-eight francs a month. At that time it was different from now. Then one was glad if one could get any one for a room. At that time there were so many rooms free, for the Germans and Austrians were all in the war.

First came Mrs. Lenin to inquire about the room. My wife really did not wish to take her. One could notice that she was of the Russian type. But then she brought her husband and the latter made a really good impression. They had had a room temporarily before, but the landlord had gone to the hospital, and when he got well they had to move. That was why Mrs. Lenin was in such a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hurry. She was really a good soul. One should never judge a person by appearances. As to looks, she was somewhat ordinary. She wore a dress that was a little bit short for that time, and she spoke somewhat hastily. Lenin himself was simple too. But he had strength in his chest. He was stocky with a broad back and a strong neck. My son often said to me: "Gosh, he has a neck like a bull! If that's a sign of will power this man must possess an iron will."

Mr. Lenin frequented the *Eintracht Restaurant*. That was where he often had dinner at noon. When he went out he always wore a visor cap. One would have taken him for a mechanic. His shoes were always the sort for going to the mountains. That is why he never needed many shoes. Only once he bought a pair from me. Very coarse, solid shoes, and he had extra nails put into them.

They were punctual in paying, those two, one must grant them that! We never had any difficulties with them, they were honorable in every respect. Every day he came down to me in the store, and fetched his correspondence. The letter carrier always put the things on the shoe box and said, "That's for the Lenins." They received mail three times a day, a mass of letters and papers.

Downstairs there was a restaurant, the *Jacobsbrunnen*. But Mr. Lenin never went in there. Anyway he was not an alcohol-drinker. He drank a lot of tea, however, just like all Russians.

He often went to bed very late. We were usually asleep when he was still walking up and down his room. Mornings he was always up and about in good time.

The Lenins always have been quiet citizens. Only once in 1917 they celebrated the Russian Revolution. Then there were at least twenty persons in the room. On the bedside table, on the chest, on the washstand, on the beds, everywhere they were sitting around.

With his wife Mr. Lenin got along well. I think the two of them never quarreled. With Mrs. Lenin it was easy to get along. She was allowed to cook in our kitchen together with my wife. We had agreed to let her do that. The two women always got along well together, which is something to wonder at if one considers that the kitchen was a narrow intestine of a room, and that the two women had to squeeze by each other to pass. Mrs. Lenin would have been a good Hausfrau, but she had her mind always on her other work. She often went up to the library and at home too she wrote an enormous amount, always by hand. That's how the household had to suffer for it. My wife made the beds. The washbowls and pails Mrs. Lenin emptied. For the dishwashing she paid four francs a month. That was not arranged but she paid it voluntarily.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The two of them had to live with unbelievable economy. In the evening there was often only tea and buttered bread. I never would have had enough from a supper like that! Only on Saturdays she made meat patties for Sunday, and these she always called cutlets. For the noon meal Mrs. Lenin often boiled only oatmeal. Now and then it happened that the oatmeal was burned, and then Mr. Lenin always told me, "Mr. Kammerer, you see we live in grand style! We have roasts every day." He called the burned oatmeal a roast.

When Mrs. Lenin wanted to travel to Russia my wife was disturbed about her going into this insecure land at such an uncertain time. Then Mrs. Lenin answered, "You see, Mrs. Kammerer, that's where I have work to do. Here I have nothing to do."

Before the Lenins traveled to Russia, Mrs. Lenin promised to write to us. Probably she did, too, but at that time one never received mail from Russia.

Before the Lenins' departure, he packed many of his belongings into a box, and said, "If I return, I take these things again, otherwise you may dispose of them." I opened the box only after the news got around that he was dead. But then I saw that the moths had raised such havoc with the plunder that I burned everything. An overcoat of his, which he left, I presented to a relative. The tea kettle, the tea strainer, and the tea glasses that the Lenins left behind, I gave to my son.

The furniture is now again in a room that I have rented on the Culmannstrasse. Only in the wardrobe I put the mirror. My people who now rent the room, do not know that these are the beds in which the Lenins slept. Many people have rented the room since that time, who would have been shocked if they had known that Lenin had slept in that very same bed.

In his room there stood two beds, a sofa, a washstand with a mirror attached, a wardrobe, a table and a few chairs. The room was well but simply furnished. After Lenin's death a reporter came once, and took pictures of the house and the store, and above all of the room and the table in it. Afterwards it was said that this was the table on which the plan for the Russian Revolution was drawn. But that was not the table at all, for the table which at that time had been in Lenin's room, stands today in my living room.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Anatomy of the Popular Front

Sidney Hook

THE PRESENT time in America is a time of political revaluation. Never before in recent American history have political labels meant so little—Republican, Democrat, Socialist, Communist. In the past it was possible with a fair degree of accuracy to make some predictions about the social beliefs and programs of an individual either on the basis of his organizational commitments or his willingness to accept some current political designations. To-day—who can say what one will find if he scratches a Democrat or a Republican? This is true not only for the old-line political parties but for the new. What can you guess about a man's social philosophy if you know that he is a member or supporter of the Labor Party? And if you hear some one argue forcefully that American capitalists have been remiss in attending to their legitimate interests in China, what is the probability that he is a Liberty League Republican or a member of the Communist Party?

Political revaluation, however, has not to any large extent expressed itself as a revaluation of ideas. It has taken the form of strategical maneuvers, new combinations and alliances with an eye to the day to day situation, not to a long time perspective. The old controlling political assumptions have been abandoned in most quarters as inadequate but new ones have not been substituted for them. A specific allegiance to an organization or a leader, a mood that all political principles are illusory, a feeling that the only thing that matters is the day to day situation has replaced "ideas" or political "philosophy." It is true that a long time perspective consists of a series of day to day situations—but a series organized from the standpoint of a basic need or interest. There are few aspects of individual or social life in which to live only from day to day is not demonstrable foolishness. But what is foolishness in art,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

education, any kind of husbandry, even in business enterprise—is currently regarded as the height of wisdom in politics. The reason for this unpragmatic empiricism is simple. The old formulas and faiths no longer work or are hopelessly irrelevant. Those who make a principle out of "no principles" are making a virtue out of their bewilderment. Instead of seeking for new leading principles of interpretation and action, instead of consciously modifying or revising the old principles, they have abandoned themselves to a course of principled confusion.

Who are they? Among the groups left of center—the Social-Democrats, Communists, Laborites, Farmer-Laborites, some Socialists, and the liberals and progressives of indeterminate hue who sleep in a different political bed every election day. All, practically, but the Bolshevist-Leninists, who have learned nothing and forgotten nothing since October 1917, and who, in their simplistic thinking, imagine that the only alternative to the murderous despotism of Stalin, is the "enlightened" minority one-party dictatorship of Lenin, out of which Stalin grew, or the "socialism" of Scheidemann or Noske. Except for this group and for some extremist sects which are important only as illustrative material for political psychopathology, it is impossible to understand the political orientation of Left-wing America on the basis of any programmatic declaration. But a *political* orientation it does have. Indeed, it is more than an orientation, it is a positive political direction towards Roosevelt and the New Deal.

Almost all the roads which in the past had Socialist and fanciful revolutionary signposts now converge on a man and a strategy publicly dedicated to the defence of capitalism, often used synonymously with democracy. None of these roads is a straight road. Some bend around Jersey City. Others skirt the region of share-croppers. A few are broken up as they run through the naval and military centers. The going becomes extremely rough when they adjoin the districts of Kelley in Chicago and Hines in New York. But they all meet at a common end.

Maps to facilitate this orientation are plentiful; justifications are few. We have cause to be thankful therefore to Max Lerner for his *It Is Later Than You Think*.* It is one of the few earnest attempts to make sense of a policy which almost the entire Left is following despite the tragic results of similar policies wherever they have been tried. For this reason, if for no other, the book deserves the attention of every student of the American political scene, of

* Viking Press, $2.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

every one who wants to understand the thought processes by which intelligent people, yesterday socialists and to-day not less conscious of themselves as socialists-at-heart, make their way to Popular Frontism. The author is a skillful writer with a flair for catching current nuances of opinion and attitude and fixing them in well-formed sentences. He is not a spokesman for the Stalinists although he seems to be in great fear of them. Like many others who are too independent to swallow the rationalizations that are cooked up in the interests of Russian foreign policy, he wishes to distinguish himself from the Stalinists and yet to escape their slanderous vituperation. The result is, as I shall show later, that whenever he is compelled to acknowledge the horrors of Stalin's regime, he has a tendency to extenuate them in order to discount their striking similarity to the domestic terror of Hitler. He has a timely discussion of the use and abuse of power in which he makes some very pertinent observations without really coming to grips with the position of those socialists who wish to safeguard against the dangers of bureaucratic corruption in a planned economy.

Lerner's book is an ideal one for our analysis because it has received extravagant praise from (to mention only a few) Mumford, Laski, Bliven, MacLeish, the book reviewer of the *New Leader,* and from left-wing supporters of Roosevelt generally. There is little doubt that many of the progressives who read and endorsed it felt that here was something that seemed to supply a perspective for their flounderings from issue to issue; that did justice to their consciousness of rectitude and yet eased their bewilderment at the sight of curious fellow-travellers in the crusade against fascism; that revivified their dying nostalgia for socialism into a new hope and yet strengthened their belief in themselves as political realists. It is, I believe, as the expression of the latest variant of American progressivism, a progressivism bold enough to declare its *ultimate* goal to be collectivism, that Max Lerner's book derives its chief significance. For the upshot of the book is an argument to show why anyone who accepts socialism should support an American Popular Front.

The central argument of the book is not continuous. It runs briefly something like this. The old liberalism is dead. The new liberalism must accept "the premises and the consequences of democratic collectivism" in order to implement its own values. The development of capitalist economy, however, which is the immediate context of all political action, leads to economic crises, to fascism and to war. How can these be obviated? The Marxist left, right and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

center are cursed either by sectarianism or opportunism. The only alternative that remains is a Popular Front of all classes opposed to reaction for the defense of whatever democracy now exists. It is a dangerous policy but not an impossible one. The dangers can be met by a militant struggle for more and better democracy with a constructive program, first, of saving capitalism from itself by a process of gradual and piecemeal socialization; second, by defeating the civil war which "as is altogether likely" will be forced upon it as soon as a significant step is taken in the direction of socialization; and finally, by finishing the job of socialization. Since capitalism cannot be revived to a point where it insures prosperity, there must be no retreat to the past. If the social services are cut down, it may help production but not the public welfare. Even the defense of the capitalist status-quo is a retreat, since the hurried tempos of change do not make the status-quo possible. Every capitalist democracy today is a crisis state which, to escape fascism, must develop into a Popular Front government in fact if not in name. The Popular Front, to be sure, is a very precarious affair with a logically delimited end. What follows it will depend upon us; and more specifically upon the organization of a Labor Party that will make political bargains and alliances with other parties but will eschew dirty politics.

Lerner has tried to forestall criticism in advance by stating some of the objections that can be raised to this program from a genuine socialist point of view. There is a disarming frankness in the concessions he is prepared to make to the opponents of his analysis. The honesty with which he faces some of the difficulties of his position encourages the hope that he will grant the implications of what he admits. But my primary interest is with the position itself. For within the limits of the probabilities that attend all political judgment, I think it can be demonstrated that this position is contradictory and self-defeating.

It is admitted on this position that the decline of capitalism cannot be checked by political measures of any kind. It is also admitted that in any Popular Front government it is the policy of the most conservative wing, which is pledged to support capitalism, that must prevail. Without capitalist parties there is no Popular Front. With them, the workingclass parties become hostages of the fear, timidity and class interest of their allies. In principle, there is no reform or concession which can be won by a Popular Front government which cannot be won from a normal capitalist democracy by militant action of organized labor and its sympathizers among other

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

classes who support a labor program. (Vide England.) It is admitted on this position that the first real step towards socialism will probably bring what Marx described as a pro-slavery rebellion to save capitalism. Could such a movement be effectively met with a key party in the government which is itself intent upon saving capitalism? And since it is admitted that there is no going back or even marking time in the face of economic decline, what alternatives remain for the Popular Front? Either to present a socialist program, which it cannot do because of its capitalist allies, or, what is more likely, to become the executioner of its own social reforms (as well as of those it has inherited), and thus incur the danger that the disillusioned masses will succumb to apathy or fall prey to fascist demagogy. *If we take what is admitted and what is implied, the whole position amounts to an invitation to disaster.* This follows from Lerner's own analysis. Either he must withdraw his critique of capitalist economy, admitting that it can be stabilized both nationally and internationally in an era of decline, or he must acknowledge that the Popular Front is a dangerous illusion which, precisely because it cannot undertake any fundamental change in the economic order, makes it easier for the Fascists to develop a mass base.

To this Lerner can make the psychologically impressive retort: the Popular Front is a form of Hobson's Choice. It may be theoretically bankrupt and historically inadequate. But what else is there? It is already later than you think! I shall accept this challenge and will indicate an alternative that is compatible both with democracy and socialism. I wish, first, to consider briefly some historical illustrations that are relevant to different aspects of the problem.

(a) It does not require great historical insight to realize that the Social Revolutionary regime under Kerensky was at the beginning of its rule and almost to the verge of October, a Popular Front government. Of course the historical situation is only roughly analogous to the present. But there was one element in the political logic of the situation which has a direct bearing upon all situations where it is necessary to meet the threat of reaction in a bold decisive way. The menace of German militarism and the restoration of Czarism was as great *then* as the menace of Fascism *now*. Why did the Social Revolutionary Party, from the first day of the revolution to the last, numerically the strongest political party, fail in every crucial test? Interesting light is cast upon this question in the important but neglected work of Victor Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution.*

Next to Kerensky, Chernov was the leading figure of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Party which controlled the Provisional Government. Indeed, before 1917 Kerensky was hardly a name in the councils of his party. Chernov, however, was not only the chief theoretical light of his party but enjoyed the prestige of intimate collaboration with the great Gershini and Gots, remarkable propagandists of the deed. Considering its source, the experience on which it is based, as well as the theoretical analysis out of which it arose, Chernov's judgment is worthy of every respect. According to Chernov, the Social Revolutionary Party lost by default because of its heterogeneous social composition which prevented it from carrying out its own principles. It had become a gigantic mass popular front party with factions ranging from extreme right to left. It could never achieve more than a unity of phrase when unity of action was the most pressing of all things. The right wing which worked hand in glove with the Cadets dominated the party. Chernov now reveals that he himself was convinced that the Provisional Government was doomed unless it gave land to the peasants, socialized basic industries, broke with the Cadets, and came to an understanding with Germany. This was the program which enabled the Bolsheviks later to acquire a majority in the Soviets. All of these questions involved crucial issues that could be settled only by a class decision. The prosecution of the war was demanded primarily by that class which sought to postpone and evade the necessary domestic social reforms. Chernov worked energetically for his program behind the scenes and succeeded on occasions in getting it formally adopted. But it remained on paper. Any attempt to carry it out would have alienated the Right. The result was that Chernov's own choice was either to break with his Party or to go along with a program he did not believe in. Chernov tried to bridge this choice by remaining quiet on important public occasions. So strange and unwonted was Chernov's silence that it enabled Trotsky to get off one of his brilliant quips: "Abstaining from the vote became for him (Chernov) a form of political life." But Chernov abstained from voting and speaking, out of fear of breaking the unity of his popular front party. Looking back on the whole situation he writes of himself: "It must be acknowledged that Chernov sacrificed to the fetish of unachievable party unity the energetic defense of the very program which the party had formally adopted at his initiative." What is true of a party which has different class wings is true of any alliance of parties that represent different classes. *The program of the group farthest to the right prevails and must prevail for this is the purchase price of its alliance. Everything else is rhetoric.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(b) Germany illustrates the danger of a Popular Front in another way. During most of the life of the Weimar Republic Germany was ruled by an informal coalition of Social Democracy, the Catholic Center and some of the smaller parties on the right and left. This Popular Front coalition went as far as any capitalist democracy has ever gone on the road of social reform. But it did not and could not take measures to transform Germany into a socialist economy. When the business cycle dipped sharply it was compelled to trim its social services. Since it would not rule the trusts, the trusts ruled it. One graphic illustration will suffice. In 1929 when the Arbitration board decided an important industrial dispute in favor of the Ruhr workers, the Ruhr industrialists refused to abide by the Arbitration award. They threatened to close down their establishments. The Social Democrats were faced with the alternative of enforcing the award which meant taking over an entire industry or capitulating. They capitulated. No other Popular Front Party would have gone along with them if they had done anything else. But acts like these merely increased the influence of the Fascists on the unemployed and poorly paid.

The direct menace of Fascism was met by a Popular Front rally around Hindenburg, the national hero, which stretched as far to the right as Hugenberg's *Deutsch-National Partei.* It was Hindenburg who called Hitler to power—legally.

In Russia there were two possible alternatives to the policy of Kerensky and the Cadets. One was taken by the Bolsheviks: the other was a proposal that had supporters in every party, viz., to organize an all labor and peasant government on the basis of the program which Chernov secretly defended and publicly attacked. Chernov's proposal was turned down in his own party and repudiated by almost all other working-class parties with the same type of arguments that are now offered for the Popular Front. In Germany, there was only one mode of political action which could have prevented Fascism, viz., a union of all the working class parties on the left, together with their sympathizers, on the basis of a militant socialist program. The Social-Democrat and Communist Parties were responsible in equal measure but for different reasons for the failure to take this road. The first was tied to the Popular Front; the second to the Kremlin's Foreign Office.

(c) France illustrates still another lesson in the disastrous policies of the Popular Front. It showed that major domestic and international problems are all of a piece. The revolutionary ferment of 1936 died down under the pacifying influence of the Popular

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Front which was able to win some reforms because the conservatives feared the mood of the masses. But in entering the government the left Parties did so on terms laid down by the Radical Socialists. The rise in the cost of living soon nullified the gains made earlier. Instead of carrying out the adjustments which had been promised, under the pressure of the Radical Socialists, the Popular Front sought "to restore confidence" in capitalism. Working class groups that led strikes during this period were denounced as agent-provocateurs by the working class parties supporting the government, particularly the Communists. The revolts against French Imperialism in the French colonies were curbed with an iron hand. Most fateful of all, the Radical Socialists refused to permit the Popular Front government, organized to defeat Fascism, to send the aid and supplies which the Spanish Popular Front needed to defeat Franco. France and Russia joined the Non-Intervention (!) Committee. Now, the chickens came home to roost. Pleading the necessities of a national emergency, *a national emergency which was the direct consequence of Popular Front foreign policy,* the remainder of the working class gains on the domestic front was whittled away. Allegedly to take a strong hand against Germany, the Popular Front had to take a strong hand against its own supporters. But since the class interests of the French bourgeoisie were not challenged at Munich, the Radical Socialists who had insisted as a condition of their participation in the Popular Front that they keep control of the Army and Foreign affairs, went all the way with Chamberlain. They were not conscious of having betrayed at Munich any of their interests, or of French interests as they interpreted them. Nor did they. When the C.G.T. and their erstwhile political allies called for a general strike, the Radical Socialists insisted that the same agent-provocateurs whom they had all joined in denouncing a few months back were the instigators of the movement. They broke the general strike and with it the back of the Popular Front. At the present writing, the French workers are in retreat, weaker than they have ever been. The menace of Fascism which was to be laid by the Popular Front looms larger than before.

What was the alternative? Had the working class parties made a United Front; had they stayed out of the Government and permitted the Conservative Parties, including the Radical Socialists, to take full responsibility for the failure to help the Spanish in their fight against international Fascism which, if and when it triumphs, will be able to attack France in the rear; had they permitted the Conservative Parties to take the complete onus for undermining the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conditions of life of the masses; had they laid the Munich Pact and everything that led up to it and followed it, at the door of the classes whose interests were *not* there betrayed—had they done all this, it is altogether likely that France would now have had a Socialist government supported by a majority of the people.

(d) Spain—bleeding, war-torn Spain—completes the picture. Here, too, the Popular Front was in power. As usual the lead was taken by the most conservative party—the Republicans. Little was done to improve the conditions of peasant life. The Popular Front program specifically repudiated the principle of nationalization of the land and even such mild measures as the nationalization of the banks. Nothing was done to liberate Morocco from the hands of the Foreign Legionnaires and its officer corps. Nothing was done to insure the loyalty of the army by democratizing its structure and eliminating the feudal officer clique which was responsible for the Asturian massacres and other crimes. But worst of all, there is evidence that the right wing was aware of the plans for the Franco revolt but instead of sounding the alarm kept silent in hopes of negotiating for its own safety. It was only by rallying the masses behind the back of the Azana-Barrios government, which issued misleading bulletins about the general tranquility and refused to arm the workers, that the labor parties were able to organize opposition to the Fascist treachery. At the beginning, the spontaneous defense of the masses was accompanied by steps towards nationalization of the large estates and some factories. Instead of pushing further in this direction, and extending it, even by decree, to Fascist controlled territory, where it would have given the peasants a stake in the struggle against Franco, a swing was made back to the program of the Republicans, who were retained in the Popular Front government. In the mistaken belief that the war against Franco could only be won by postponing fundamental social reforms, almost all of the early efforts along these lines were liquidated. In the vain hope that aid would be received from other capitalist powers, the Popular Front abandoned even its slight socialist coloration. In exchange for some belated supplies from Russia, paid for in ready gold, it gave the G.P.U. a free hand to frame-up, jail and assassinate any socialists who, while fighting Franco, were also critical of Stalin's reign of terror.* It became the pawn and victim of the powers in the Non-Intervention Committee. Deserted by those to whom it had looked for aid, paralyzed by the sacrifice of any social program which could

*The story has now been told by the Chief of the Soviet Military Intelligence in Western Europe, General W. G. Krivitsky—the unhappy man who carried out Stalin's orders in Spain. Cf. *The Saturday Evening Post*, April 15, 1939.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have rallied the workers and peasants throughout the whole of Spain, weakened by the loss of morale among its own followers, who were told that they must fight not for socialism but for the status-quo out of whose unresolved tensions the revolt had developed—the tragic end was inescapable. Towards the close the leaders of all the parties in the Popular Front offered to capitulate if Franco would promise to spare the lives of those among them who had not yet fled. With unexampled brazenness, the workers were asked to continue the fight not even for a Popular Front victory but merely that their leaders, whose policy had been responsible for the defeat, could save their hides.

(e) A word or two about the Popular Front at home. Lerner is right in regarding the Roosevelt administration as a Popular Front government. But he does not see that it has already spent its force and is in retreat. In this retreat whoever aids it, is objectively preventing the emergence of a Labor Party dedicated to independent working class action. Because it is a Popular Front government it could not lift the Spanish Embargo; it could not proceed against the Southern Bourbons; it could not secure sufficient funds for relief; it had to capitulate to the utilities; it had to appease business with a new tax program. The policy of appeasement is about to begin in earnest. More ominous still is Roosevelt's inflated armament program. At best it is a means of escaping from the necessity of defending and carrying forward the program outlined by Lerner. At worst, it is a preparation for war, the last resort of every capitalist statesman or politician who desires to stave off fundamental social change. And when we remember that war means fascism in full military dress, the arc of Popular Front futility spirals downward to the bloody mire it sought to avoid.

II

The basic theoretical confusion which attends most discussions of the Popular Front consists in an identification of two propositions: (1) The working class and its mass organizations must be the basis of the socialist movement; and (2) the working class and its mass organizations can by themselves win power and achieve socialism. The falsity of the second proposition is obvious, especially when it is doubtful that the working class constitutes a majority of the population. But the falsity of the second proposition does not imply the falsity of the first. The socialist movement must be based upon the working class, to mention only one of many reasons, be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cause in virtue of its situation in contemporary society there can be no solution of its problems, nor even the plausible appearance of a solution, short of the abolition of the profit system. In this it differs from other classes who may indeed, like the farmers and petty bourgeoisie, have their burdens but who with more seeming justification believe that a partial yet satisfactory solution of their predicament is possible under capitalism. The program of socialism can no more be taken away from the workers than capitalism can be taken away from the capitalists.

Despite this it remains true that without allies from the farmers and lower middle classes the workers can never enjoy socialism in our time. The standing problem, then, of the political parties of the working class becomes the problem of educating their potential allies to the fact that their basic difficulties cannot be solved by their own political programs, all of which run counter to the fundamental tendencies of capitalist development. To state it positively, the problem is to make their potential allies see that the socialist solution proposed by the working class parties is ultimately the only solution possible for all producers and consumers.

This requires unremitting use of the most effective techniques of persuasion, organization, and militant struggle for continuous improvement in living conditions. It requires opposition to every step towards Fascism, no matter how progressive the terminology, and the clearest differentiation from Stalinism together with its fronts, stooges, and innocents. It is simply not the case, as Max Lerner imagines, that it is impossible for a program which expresses the immediate interests of a class to receive the support of the majority of the population. The histories of the Republican and Democratic Parties reveal that this is the general rule of American political life, that it is possible to rally an absolute majority behind the political program of a definite bourgeois class.

Precisely for this reason, i.e., because it *does* want to win over sympathizers and allies from all other classes, the working class should not join a Popular Front of political parties representing different classes, not to speak of a National Front of all parties. For if it does, it thereby accepts and publicizes a program of stabilizing capitalism which, on its own economic theory, is doomed to fail, leaving its credulous followers easy picking for Fascism. The campaigns and slogans of working class parties must always be formulated with an eye to the needs of other groups who also suffer from oppression and economic disabilities under the existing order. But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this is a far cry from an alliance with other class parties whose programs are in principle incompatible with a socialist perspective.

It is astounding but true that many of the advocates of a Popular Front confuse it with a United Front. In politics it seems that anyone can set himself up as an expert without having to familiarize himself with the history, theory, and concrete practical problems that are at the basis of all fundamental questions of strategy and tactics. A United Front is an agreement between different political organizations with different political programs for joint action on a specific issue for a limited period of time. It is *not* an agreement on a common political program; for in that case what we have is a capitulation to the political program of the most conservative party in the coalition, a state of affairs illustrated by all Popular Fronts. A United Front is usually an agreement between political parties of the same class; but on some important specific issues it may represent an agreement between parties of different classes. It is even conceivable that on an extremely urgent issue involving a common danger, after careful precautions have been taken and full liberty of criticism has been reserved, Labor Parties may form a United Front with a party already in the government but without themselves joining the government or giving its general program any support.

The moral of the whole discussion may now be drawn. A Socialist who calls for the formation of a Popular Front cannot do so without in effect surrendering his socialism—no matter what he says in his heart. A Socialist who relies on the program of a Popular Front to combat Fascism is entrusting his fate to an historically discredited instrument whose weakness has been established in every situation. A Socialist who supports a Popular Front government may find that as a result of its program of defense of capitalism, it may open the gates to the Fascists who are even more resolute defenders of capitalism. There are many who cry "Peace" when they mean War; and not a few Fascists, before they come to power, repudiate the label. It was none other than Huey Long who observed: "It will be easy to bring Fascism in America. All you have to say is that you are preventing Fascism."

It is false to assert that for a Socialist there is no alternative to the Popular Front. It is only when the situation has been made hopeless by mistaken policies, adopted at a time when there was still a clear alternative, that this appears to be the case. And even then, this only *appears* to be the case.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

III

Due to limitations of space I can only touch briefly on Max Lerner's references to Russia and the question of power. On substantially the same grounds as Trotsky, but with no better reason, he regards Russia as a workers' state. He glides over the question whether in *fact* the State is controlled by the workers; nor does he discuss the method by which one would go about determining the fact. He does not state what class in Russia, since presumably there are no classes, is being oppressed by the state power. In the interests of the Popular Front, which is to include the Communist Party, any fundamental criticism of Stalin's regime must be ruled out. It is not the struggle for socialism but abstention from criticism of the Russian regime which constitutes for the Stalinists the minimum program of participation in the Popular Front. Lerner consequently tones down his criticism of Stalin to such a degree that only Communists of exacerbated sensibilities will take umbrage at them. There is not a single question that concerns Russia which Max Lerner does not handle like a hot potato in the mouth. And since he links his defense of collectivism to a broad cultural humanism, I feel justified in holding him to the values he invokes.

He admits that there is some basis for the comparison often drawn between the regimes of Germany and Russia because of "the cult of the leader, the suppression of the opposition, the control of the channels of opinion," etc.—but concludes that "to equate" them is "a semi-truth far more false than true." To be sure there is even a difference between being shot and being hanged. To equate any two things in the abstract, even two Fascist powers like Italy and Turkey or Germany and Japan, is far more false than true. Comparison is intelligently made with respect to *specific* features for a certain purpose. For Lerner the fact that Russia has a socialist economy makes it basically different from Germany which has a capitalist economy. Economy, then, seems to be Lerner's fundamental criterion for coupling or uncoupling countries when discussing their social form. Yet Lerner also admits that every democratic state *even under a Popular Front regime* has a capitalist economy—basically like Germany. Why, then, does he line up the capitalist democracies and Russia, on the one side, and the Fascist states, on the other, for a new Armageddon? Is it true to suggest that Russia and capitalist democracies considered abstractly or concretely have more in common than either one with Fascism? On Lerner's analysis, states that are basically the same (democratic capitalism and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fascist capitalism) are apparently more opposed to each other than they are to states (Russia) from which they are basically different. The explanation of this confusion is simple.

When Lerner speaks of Germany and the capitalist democracies, the political and cultural differences between them become the basic differentiating feature. When he speaks of Russia and the capitalist democracies, these no longer are a basic differentiating feature, otherwise Russia would have to be equated with Germany. When he speaks of Russia and Germany, suddenly their economies emerge as the most relevant feature of differentiation—and this from the standpoint of a militant democrat!

But has Russia a socialist economy? Here, too, we must remember that "economy" is an abstraction that covers many different features of economic life. Comparison is meaningful when the *specific* features of the economic *behavior* in any two states are examined. If this is done in an empirical way, which demands more than a reading of paper decrees, many striking similarities between the economies of Germany and Russia will be discovered. The subject demands a treatise as far as details go but I do not think it would be difficult to show on the basis of the data supplied by the Russian government itself, that it is not socialist in the Marxist sense; nor would it be difficult to show that Germany is not capitalist in the conventional sense. Both are different kinds of mixed economies. It is just as significant to speak of the "exploitation of labor" in Russia as in Germany. This does not equate Germany and Russia. Nor does it permit anyone to discount the impressive similarity of their totalitarian cultural patterns by vague reference to "economy" in the abstract.

Another characteristic of Lerner's discussion of Russia is that where he admits the record of horror and brutality, he immediately goes on to explain that given the historical situation, the record is understandable. Understandable? Yes, and the same is true for Germany which Lerner leaves without benefit of historical understanding. But does this mean that given their past, nothing else could have occurred in Russia or Germany? That the leaderships are not responsible for their respective crimes against millions of defenceless creatures because no possible alternative of action was open to them? Absurd! Russia, pleads Lerner, never had strong democratic traditions, went through a revolution, has spies in its midst, is encircled by hostile foreign powers, and that therefore "the emergency tension that generated the absolutism of power serves to justify its continuance — at least in the minds of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

leaders and, no doubt (*sic!*), of the vast majority of the people." With just as much truth do apologists of Germany explain Hitler's actions. How can Max Lerner have "no doubt" about what people approve in a country which he himself describes as ruled by a minority dictatorship, resting, as all dictatorships must, on bayonets, a vast secret police, and concentration camps?

The saddest feature, to me, of Lerner's description of Russia is his attitude towards the Moscow trials. He tries desperately to skirt it. But he introduces it by indirection after uttering a mild criticism of Russia because it does not permit an opposition. Russia, he holds, should permit an opposition so that those who hold different opinions would not be driven to "sabotage, treason and the threat of revolt." This is comparable to someone who discussing the Sacco-Vanzetti case were to say, "the social conditions of fish peddlers should be improved so that the poor wretches would not be driven to acts of desperation; society would thus gain by their productive work." Does Mr. Lerner believe that his admission of the guilt of the Moscow defendants will bring him absolution from the Stalinists for his mild criticism about the suppression of opposition? He is mistaken. But why should he deplore the suppression of opposition when, on his own theory, this was an unavoidable historical consequence of Russian conditions? Lerner cannot have it both ways at once. If the circumstances that attended the Russian Revolution made the violent suppression of all opposition parties necessary, as he contends on one page, then by what right of logic or history does he reprove the Stalinists for this on another page?

Lerner might reply that it is just as compatible with his position to believe that the Moscow defendants were victims of a frame-up as to believe that they were guilty as charged. In either case the horrors of a minority one-party dictatorship are revealed. Precisely. Then why does he commit himself to the belief in their guilt? On what principle of the "vertical" or "horizontal" humanism which he defends in his book, is he justified in disregarding the Report of the Dewey Commission of Inquiry into the Moscow Trials?* Lerner's duty to familiarize himself with this report is peculiarly pressing. He was one of the intimidated or misinformed who in a signed and published statement accused the American committee formed to defend Trotsky's rights to asylum and an open hearing, of helping "armed intervention (no less!) into the Soviet Union." The Dewey Commission Report is a consequence of the efforts of

* ***Not Guilty!*** **Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Charges Made Against Leon Trotsky in the Moscow Trials. Harpers, 1938. $2.75.**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this Committee to establish the truth. Why does Lerner avoid it? Is it because he has not the courage to disavow a tragic error or is it in the interest of the "unity" of the Popular Front whose most vociferous supporter is the Communist Party? I do not believe it is the first; and if the second is the reason for Lerner's attitude, in the mind of a sincere humanist this should constitute an argument against the Popular Front.

But why are the Moscow trials and purges so important for socialists except as an issue, as Lerner in one place suggests, "on which to split a labor movement"? The answer may be clearer if we consider Lerner's discussion of the uses and abuses of power. He writes as if those socialists who have warned against the corruption of power in a planned society believe that power is intrinsically bad, and that, therefore, no effort should be made either to take it, or to use it, or (when the enemy has it) even to combat it. An easy position to refute if we can only find some one who holds it. No one takes Lord Acton's maxim literally. Nor did Acton himself. Those socialists who have been concerned with the problem have their eye on the *specific* dangers of corruption made possible by concentration of power in a planned economy *and the means to be adopted to counteract them.* Some of these dangers are of the same generic kind as those found in a capitalist society but are intensified in a society where property, including means of *publication,* has been socialized. Some, however, are unique. In a democratic capitalistic society in virtue of private property of the instruments of production, it is possible to some extent to secure the means of making some protest against oppression; the very defects of an unplanned economy make it possible to find some kind of work even when opposing capitalism; there is an area of private life and of voluntary association for public life relatively free of governmental supervision; there is at least a fighting chance for the survival of non-conformists. A planned economy, however, makes it easy to consolidate in the hands of a few party politicians tremendous agencies of repression extending into *every* phase of life. Once ticketed and docketed, any citizen who runs foul of the political bosses can be deprived of his job, his living quarters, his food, his right to move about, even to breathe free air. Under such circumstances, the right to die may become a luxury, dependent upon a bureaucratic whim, since it spells release from torture.

There is nothing fantastic about the fear of abuse of power in a planned economy—from the point of view of the worker, the consumer, the artist and the scholar. Nor does it justify the panicky

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conclusion that bureaucratic degeneration is inevitable.* But the obvious and quite specific ways in which these abuses may occur justify the strongest emphasis on democratic checks and procedures as a *sine qua non* of any kind of socialism worth fighting for. The chief sources of possible oppression in a planned economy fall under four heads which here can only be enumerated: the necessity of centralizing administrative authority: the drive for efficiency (when is inefficiency sabotage?); the emergence of power drives when control over things gives control over men; the differences in standards of living which, since needs are variable, relative and historical, are by no means eliminated in a planned economy.

The very least we can demand of a planned economy, if it is not to develop into another monstrous variety of Russian totalitarianism, is that it be more democratic, more jealous of the civil rights of its humblest member, than the most enlightened capitalist democracy is of its wealthiest. If a planned economy needs frame-ups, torture, false confessions wrung even from children, purge by murder, and purges of purgers, as oil for its wheels, it will be the bloodiest Juggernaut that has ever run amok in human history. To the extent that anyone fails to condemn these practices in Russia where the evidence for their existence is overwhelming, there is no assurance that he will be opposed to them elsewhere. That is why the issue of the Moscow trials must be put in the forefront of every discussion of socialism today.

*Cf. my critique of Mosca (Pareto, Michel, et al) in *The Nation*, May 13, 1939.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

William Butler Yeats: Two Essays

I

The Public v. the Late Mr. William Butler Yeats

W. H. Auden

THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR:

Gentlemen of the jury. Let us be quite clear in our minds as to the nature of this case. We are here to judge, not a man, but his work. Upon the character of the deceased, therefore, his affectations of dress and manner, his inordinate personal vanity, traits which caused a fellow countryman and former friend to refer to him as the greatest literary fop in history, I do not intend to dwell. I must only remind you that there is usually a close connection between the personal character of a poet and his work, and that the deceased was no exception.

Again I must draw your attention to the exact nature of the charge. That the deceased had talent is not for a moment in dispute; so much is freely admitted by the prosecution. What the defence are asking you to believe, however, is that he was a great poet, the greatest of this century writing in English. That is their case, and it is that which the prosecution feels bound most emphatically to deny.

A great poet. To deserve such an epithet, a poet is commonly required to convince us of these things: firstly a gift of a very high order for memorable language, secondly a profound understanding of the age in which he lived, and thirdly a working knowledge of and sympathetic attitude towards the most progressive thought of his time.

Did the deceased possess these? I am afraid, gentlemen, that the answer is, no.

On the first point I shall be brief. My learned friend, the counsel for the defence, will, I have no doubt, do his best to convince you that I am wrong. And he has a case, gentlemen. O yes, a very fine case. I shall only ask you to apply to the work of the deceased a very simple test. How many of his lines can you remember?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Further, it is not unreasonable to suppose that a poet who has a gift for language will recognize that gift in others. I have here a copy of an Anthology edited by the deceased entitled *"The Oxford Book of Modern Verse."* I challenge anyone in this court to deny that it is the most deplorable volume ever issued under the imprint of that highly respected firm which has done so much for the cause of poetry in this country, The Clarendon Press.

But in any case you and I are educated modern men. Our fathers imagined that poetry existed in some private garden of its own, totally unrelated to the workaday world, and to be judged by pure aesthetic standards alone. We know that now to be an illusion. Let me pass, then, to my second point. Did the deceased understand his age?

What did he admire? What did he condemn? Well, he extolled the virtues of the peasant. Excellent. But should that peasant learn to read and write, should he save enough money to buy a shop, attempt by honest trading to raise himself above the level of the beasts, and O, what a sorry change is there. Now he is the enemy, the hateful huxter whose blood, according to the unseemly boast of the deceased, never flowed through *his* loins. Had the poet chosen to live in a mud cabin in Galway among swine and superstition, we might think him mistaken, but we should admire his integrity. But did he do this? O dear no. For there was another world which seemed to him not only equally admirable, but a deal more agreeable to live in, the world of noble houses, of large drawing rooms inhabited by the rich and the decorative, most of them of the female sex. We do not have to think very hard or very long, before we shall see a connection between these facts. The deceased had the feudal mentality. He was prepared to admire the poor just as long as they remained poor and deferential, accepting without protest the burden of maintaining a little Athenian band of literary landowners, who without their toil could not have existed for five minutes.

For the great struggle of our time to create a juster social order, he felt nothing but the hatred which is born of fear. It is true that he played a certain part in the movement for Irish Independence, but I hardly think my learned friend will draw your attention to that. Of all the modes of self-evasion open to the well-to-do, Nationalism is the easiest and most dishonest. It allows to the unjust all the luxury of righteous indignation against injustice. Still, it has often inspired men and women to acts of heroism and self-sacrifice. For the sake of a free Ireland the poet Pearse and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the countess Markovitz gave their all. But if the deceased did give himself to this movement, he did so with singular moderation. After the rebellion of Easter Sunday 1916, he wrote a poem on the subject which has been called a masterpiece. It is. To succeed at such a time in writing a poem which could offend neither the Irish Republicans nor the British army was indeed a masterly achievement.

And so we come to our third and last point. The most superficial glance at the last fifty years is enough to tell us that the social struggle towards greater equality has been accompanied by a growing intellectual acceptance of the scientific method and the steady conquest of irrational superstition. What was the attitude of the deceased towards this? Gentlemen, words fail me. What are we to say of a man whose earliest writings attempted to revive a belief in fairies and whose favorite themes were legends of barbaric heroes with unpronounceable names, work which has been aptly and wittily described as Chaff about Bran!

But you may say, he was young; youth is always romantic; its silliness is part of its charm. Perhaps it is. Let us forgive the youth, then, and consider the mature man, from whom we have a right to expect wisdom and common sense. Gentlemen, it is hard to be charitable when we find that the deceased, far from outgrowing his folly, has plunged even deeper. In 1900 he believed in fairies; that was bad enough; but in 1930 we are confronted with the pitiful, the deplorable spectacle of a grown man occupied with the mumbo-jumbo of magic and the nonsense of India. Whether he seriously believed such stuff to be true, or merely thought it petty, or imagined it would impress the public, is immaterial. The plain fact remains that he made it the centre of his work. Gentlemen, I need say no more. In the last poem he wrote, the deceased rejected social justice and reason, and prayed for war. Am I mistaken in imagining that somewhat similar sentiments are expressed by a certain foreign political movement which every lover of literature and liberty acknowledges to be the enemy of mankind?

THE COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE:

Gentlemen of the Jury. I am sure you have listened with as much enjoyment as I to the eloquence of the prosecution. I say enjoyment because the spectacle of anything well-done, whether it be a feat of engineering, a poem, or even an outburst of impassioned oratory, must always give pleasure.

We have been treated to an analysis of the character of the deceased which for all I know, may be as true as it is destructive.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Whether it proves anything about the value of his poetry is another matter. If I may be allowed to quote my learned friend. "We are here to judge, not a man but his work." We have been told that the deceased was conceited, that he was a snob, that he was a physical coward, that his taste in contemporary poetry was uncertain, that he could not understand physics and chemistry. If this is not an invitation to judge the man I do not know what is. Does it not bear an extraordinary resemblance to the belief of an earlier age that a great artist must be chaste? Take away the frills, and the argument of the prosecution is reduced to this: "A great poet must give the right answers to the problems which perplex his generation. The deceased gave the wrong answers. Therefore the deceased was not a great poet." Poetry in such a view is the filling up of a social quiz; to pass with honours the poet must score not less than 75%. With all due respect to my learned friend, this is nonsense. We are tempted so to judge contemporary poets because we really do have problems which we really do want solved, so that we are inclined to expect everyone, politicians, scientists, poets, clergymen, to give us the answer, and to blame them indiscriminately when they do not. But who reads the poetry of the past in this way? In an age of rising nationalism, Dante looked back with envy to the Roman Empire. Was this socially progressive? Will only a Catholic admit that Dryden's "The Hind and the Panther" is a good poem? Do we condemn Blake because he rejected Newton's theory of light, or rank Wordsworth lower than Baker, because the latter had a deeper appreciation of the steam engine?

Can such a view explain why

Mock Emmet, Mock Parnell
All the renown that fell

is good; and bad, such a line as

Somehow I think that you are rather like a tree

In pointing out that this is absurd, I am not trying to suggest that art exists independently of society. The relation between the two is just as intimate and important as the prosecution asserts.

Every individual is from time to time excited emotionally and intellectually by his social and material environment. In certain individuals this excitement produces verbal structures which we call poems; if such a verbal structure creates an excitement in the reader, we call it a good poem. Poetic talent, in fact, is the power to make personal excitement socially available. Poets, i.e. persons with poetic talent, stop writing good poetry when they stop

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reacting to the world they live in. The nature of that reaction, whether it be positive or negative, morally admirable or morally disgraceful, matters very little, what is essential is that the reaction should genuinely exist. The later Wordsworth is not inferior to the earlier because the poet had altered his political opinions, but because he had ceased to feel and think so strongly, a change which happens, alas, to most of us as we grow older. Now, when we turn to the deceased, we are confronted by the amazing spectacle of a man of great poetic talent, whose capacity for excitement not only remained with him to the end, but actually increased. In two hundred years when our children have made a different and, I hope, better social order, and when our science has developed out of all recognition, who but a historian will care a button whether the deceased was right about the Irish Question or wrong about the transmigration of souls? But because the excitement out of which his poems arose was genuine, they will still, unless I am very much mistaken, be capable of exciting others, different though their circumstances and beliefs may be from his.

However since we are not living two hundred years hence, let us play the school teacher a moment, and examine the poetry of the deceased with reference to the history of our time.

The most obvious social fact of the last forty years is the failure of liberal capitalist democracy, based on the premises that every individual is born free and equal, each an absolute entity independent of all others. And that a formal political equality, the right to vote, the right to a fair trial, the right of free speech, is enough to guarantee his freedom of action in his relations with his fellow men. The results are only too familiar to us all. By denying the social nature of personality, and by ignoring the social power of money, it has created the most impersonal, the most mechanical and the most unequal civilization the world has ever seen, a civilization in which the only emotion common to all classes is a feeling of individual isolation from everyone else, a civilization torn apart by the opposing emotions born of economic injustice, the just envy of the poor and the selfish terror of the rich.

If these latter emotions meant little to the deceased, it was partly because Ireland compared with the rest of western Europe was economically backward, and the class struggle was less conscious there. My learned friend has sneered at Irish Nationalism, but he knows as well as I that Nationalism is a necessary stage towards socialism. He has sneered at the deceased for not taking arms, as if shooting were the only honorable and useful form of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

social action. Has the Abbey Theatre done nothing for Ireland?

But to return to the poems. From first to last they express a sustained protest against the social atomisation caused by industrialism, and both in their ideas and their language a constant struggle to overcome it. The fairies and heroes of the early work were an attempt to find through folk tradition a binding force for society; and the doctrine of Anima Mundi found in the later poems is the same thing, in a more developed form, which has left purely local peculiarities behind, in favor of something that the deceased hoped was universal; in other words, he was working for a world religion. A purely religious solution may be unworkable, but the search for it is, at least, the result of a true perception of a social evil. Again, the virtues that the deceased praised in the peasantry and aristocracy, and the vices he blamed in the commercial classes were real virtues and vices. To create a united and just society where the former are fostered and the latter cured is the task of the politician, not the poet.

For art is a product of history, not a cause. Unlike some other products, technical inventions for example, it does not re-enter history as an effective agent, so that the question whether art should or should not be propaganda is unreal. The case for the prosecution rests on the fallacious belief that art ever makes anything happen, whereas the honest truth, gentlemen, is that, if not a poem had been written, not a picture painted not a bar of music composed, the history of man would be materially unchanged.

But there is one field in which the poet is a man of action, the field of language, and it is precisely in this that the greatness of the deceased is most obviously shown. However false or undemocratic his ideas, his diction shows a continuous evolution towards what one might call the true democratic style. The social virtues of a real democracy are brotherhood and intelligence, and the parallel linguistic virtues are strength and clarity, virtues which appear even more clearly through successive volumes by the deceased.

The diction of *The Winding Stair,* is the diction of a just man, and it is for this reason that just men will always recognize the author as a master.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

II

The Poet as Poet

Delmore Schwartz

"A MIRACLE of development!" Thus one critic describes the contrast between the early and the later poetry of Yeats. The astonishment, the phenomenal applause contained in this phrase and in much that was said of the poet's last two volumes of verse are compelled by the complexity of a literary career which lasted for fifty years, and which exhibits, looking backward, the process of a bad poet of the 'Nineties becoming a great poet in middle age. Henceforth no poet can be regarded as utterly hopeless: the possibility of a Yeatsian miracle will always present itself.

During the first half of his career, the poems which Yeats wrote were full of a verbal glitter, an effect of being very "poetic," a soft mellifluous speech to please the reader who delights in the most obvious aural quality—the Shelleyan-Swinburnian quality—of language. Yeats was the son of a painter friendly with the Pre-Raphaelite group, to whom he was introduced and with whom he himself became very friendly, and certain poems may be affected by that visual example. During this period, too, Yeats visited Mme. Blavatsky (though she had recently been discredited by the Society for Psychical Research), so that Indian deities join the Irish ones in some poems. The young poet's interest in such matters and his experimental attitude toward them is but one more example of the desperate shifts to which the poetic sensibility was reduced by the world-picture presented by nineteenth-century science: "I am very religious," Yeats explains in his *Autobiographies,* "and deprived by Huxley and Tyndall, whom I detested, of the simple-minded religion of my childhood, I had made a new religion", an activity which continued throughout his life. From beginning to end, Yeats was evidently prepared to try anything, Socialism or hashish, once or twice. The idiom in which he wrote, however, was the period style, based upon a misunderstanding of Baudelaire and Mallarmé by an emphasis of their superficial qualities. A just example of this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

writing is this stanza from a poem in Yeats' fourth book of poems, "The Wind Among the Reeds":

> Dim Powers of drowsy thought, let her no longer be
> Like the pale cup of the sea,
> When the winds have gathered and sun and moon burned dim
> Above its cloudy rim;
> But let a gentle silence wrought with music flow
> Whither her footsteps go.

During the latter half of his life, a genuine revolution in style occurs, although the subjects of the poems remain the same, as did the poet's interests. Instead of a general effect, a specific one is always intended; instead of dim images musically sounded, the precise word and the precise observation are used to get a specific emotion upon the page. The poet's initial gift for versifying has become the power to get into verbal behavior, into meter and diction, the slightest shift in emotion, the least movement of attitude and tone. Here he is writing of the same woman as in the poem just quoted, although she is now old:

> Her present image floats into the mind—
> Did Quattrocento finger fashion it
> Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind
> And took a mess of shadows for its meat?
> And I though never of Ledaean kind
> Had pretty plumage once—enough of that,
> Better to smile on all that smile, and show
> There is a comfortable kind of old scarecrow.

The mastery of the poet is displayed in the ease with which he shifts from a description of the beautiful woman as old to the personal emotion with which it is involved and the irony consequent upon it which completes itself in the phrase "pretty plumage", while the further shift in emotion is contained perfectly in the brief mark of punctuation and the colloquial phrase which follows, "—enough of that". It is this ability to represent emotion with the greatest vividness, directness, and dramatic justification which constitutes Yeats' peculiar gift, rather than the understanding and insight or the brilliance of observation or the freshness of attitudes and values which are the more usual marks of the great poet.

It is natural to try to explain the transformation of the poet in terms of his life or the life of his times, the fact, for example, that he participated in the Irish Nationalist movement for a time and attempted to participate in the life of the people. But Yeats,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the *Autobiographies,* says nothing of decisive events which would compel a great change of heart and of style, nor does he attribute the change to any interest apart from his will as a poet to go from an over-decorative style to a bare one. Such an explanation begs the question, which is the reason for wishing the modification and the source of the means to accomplish it. One concludes, then, that the explanation is to be found in a culmination of factors, just as the change is displayed gradually through ten years in his poems.

During the years in which the change began to show itself, Yeats was faced with failures of various sorts. His early fame had begun to wane, his long courtship of one woman had ended in emptiness. The Abbey Theatre, on which his hopes for a poetic theatre rested, had received little but abuse and misunderstanding, the whole Irish literary renaissance had faded, and many of his most gifted friends, Wilde, Dowson, Lionel Johnson, and Synge, had died in misery and degradation. This would be enough to make most men forget about the land of dreams and the Irish fairyland of the early poems.

Something much more complicated than a mere forgetting happened or would seem to have happened to Yeats. He seized upon the opposition between the land of dreams and the actuality about him, and engaged in a continual see-saw between the two. The structure, so to speak, of thought and of feeling became what Yeats came to call *antithetical.* Antithesis as a dynamic process of the conflict and interchange of opposites, became the movement and the framework which he saw everywhere, just as a man who has donned rose-colored glasses sees the color of rose on all things. The antithesis took many forms—day and night, life and death, the sun and the moon, the natural and the supernatural—but the fundamental opposition was between what Yeats called subjectivity and objectivity; or less ambiguously, between introversion and extroversion, for Yeats was really concerned with psychological attitudes. A whole philosophy of history and of human nature in these terms is the result: everything that happens to man and to society is viewed as a stage in the passage from objectivity to subjectivity or from subjectivity to objectivity.

Yeats began with subjectivity, that is to say, with ART, spelled with capitals, and opposed to Life, which was sordid, sodden, and soiled, or, as Lionel Johnson said of the poems of Arthur Symons, constituted by "a London fog, the blurred tawny lamplight, the red omnibus, the glaring gin shop, the slatternly shivering women."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yeats literally inhaled the doctrine of Art for Art's Sake as a young man; from his father, who quoted only poetry significant of intense emotion, believing only such poetry was genuine, or from Oscar Wilde, who told him that his narrative verse was like Homer, or from Walter Pater ("we looked consciously to Pater for our philosophy"), Yeats and many of his friends learned that nothing was as important as "Beauty." Not only ought one to occupy one's daily life with aesthetic experiences above all, but there was only one justification for other experiences, the possibility that they might be a means to the creation of a great work of art. To be a poet for Yeats actually included a deliberate appearance, the pale dreamer of mussed hair, flowing tie, and ethereal look which caricature has now established in the popular mind as the figure of the poet and which is established as Yeats' image by the portraits next to the title-page of many of his books. Lionel Johnson, whom he admired as the most learned of his friends, had told Yeats that "Life is ritual," and Yeats never stopped seeking ritual, formality, and ceremony, as traits of Art. One more attitude of the young Yeats is important because he adheres to it throughout his life and it enters into many of his poems, the romantic conception of woman: "Woman herself was still in our eyes romantic and mysterious, still the priestess of her shrine, our emotions remembering the *Lilith* and the *Sybilla Palmifera* of Rossetti."

The priestess of Yeats' shrine was Maud Gonne, who was devoting her whole life to Irish Nationalism, an activity on her part which Yeats never stopped regretting, even in the poems of his latest volume. Partly in the hope of winning her, Yeats entered the movement himself and what occurred then, by his own confession, seems the fundamental motion of his life: "I went hither and thither speaking at meetings in England and Scotland, and occasionally at tumultuous Dublin conventions, and endured the worst months of my life," "I took pride in an evening spent with some small organizer into whose spittoon I secretly poured my third glass of whiskey," "I dreaded some wild Fenian movement, and with literature perhaps more in my mind than politics, dreamed of that Unity of Culture which might begin with some few men controlling some form of administration."

With literature perhaps more in my mind than politics! This is precisely the equivocal attitude which Yeats maintained everywhere. The poet of the 'Nineties was dragged again and again from his tower into the most alien and the least desired circumstances. In the midst of them he did not for one moment surrender his notion

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of himself as Poet, nor his belief that Art was the most important value of life. In this sense he was intransigent; and yet, on the other hand, he was the most flexible member of his generation. And this double character, the capacity to be both intransigent and yet to be drawn into many circumstances of existence which have little to do with Art, shows itself in his best poems.

Consider "Easter 1916," which is supposedly a political poem. What is said, in crude brevity, is that the poet has known the leaders of the Easter Rebellion who were executed and had thought of them as casual and unimportant acquaintances; the fact that they have become a part of a national tragedy suggests not a political nor a patriotic conclusion to Yeats, but he speaks from the standpoint of a man long obsessed with being a poet when he writes, as the refrain of the poem:

> A terrible beauty is born

Again, he writes a short poem during the World War about an Irish airman, in which the airman is supposedly revealing his reasons for participating in the war on the side of Great Britain:

> Those that I fight I do not hate,
> Those that I hate I do not love. . . .
> My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
> No likely end could bring them loss,
> Or leave them happier than before.
> Nor law nor duty bade me fight,
> Nor public men nor cheering crowds,
> A lonely impulse of delight
> Drove to this tumult in the clouds. . . .

The lonely impulse of delight, the rejection of law, duty, public men, and cheering crowds, betrays the voice as that of the poet of the 'Nineties who has lived into the next generation. Yeats has transformed his hypothetical airman into a romantic poet, or we may say, if we consider this poem in relation to his work as a whole, that even when confronted with the World War, the poet succeeds in sustaining the romantic attitude with which he began; but not, however, without being perfectly aware of the difficult circumstances in which he is sustaining it.

And once more, in the volume of verse which was published in 1929, Yeats writes of two beautiful women who, like Maud Gonne, had devoted their lives to politics, and he remains utterly unchanged in the sentiment which motivates his poem:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Two girls in silk kimonos, both
Beautiful, one a gazelle. . . .
The older is condemned to death,
Pardoned, drags out lonely years.
I know not what the younger dreams—
Some vague Utopia — and she seems,
When **withered old and skeleton-gaunt,**
An image of such politics. . . .
Dear shadows, now you know it all,
All the folly of a fight
With a common wrong or right.
The innocent and the beautiful
Have no enemy but time. . . .

To think that the innocent and the beautiful have no enemy but time is probably not a Shakespearean nor a Biblical wisdom, if taken in itself as a literal statement. But the emotion which this poem is concerned to represent transfigures the statement, for the poem concludes with a dramatic statement of the poet's longing to destroy time altogether, a desire which is related, as in other poems, to the poet's awareness that it is history, the movement of his age, which has greatly altered the bases and the assumptions with which he began to practise his art.

Many other later poems concern this hatred of time and the change which attends all natural things, and this hatred takes several significant forms. There is the emotion, in such a poem as "Sailing to Byzantium," to be outside of time and a part of "the artifice of eternity"; the poet longs to be free of birds, beasts, and the young in one another's arms, and to become what? a work of art! Eternity or heaven is conceived by the poet as being like Byzantium, a civilization in which artificiality and ritual dominate, where all that is natural is suppressed, where the unchanging is the good, where art is the structure of existence:

A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains
All that man is,
All mere complexities,
The fury and the mire of human veins.

The next best thing to being free of the fury of human veins in a Byzantine civilization is to exist in a society where a landed aristocracy rules. In every poem on the subject of the landed aristocracy as the good society, the figure of the artist appears in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

doorway, works of art abound, the rich man, or the rich woman. Lady Gregory, has been the patron of artists, and by means of the country house and its tradition, ceremony, and continuity, a victory over change and history is made possible, though only for a while. "I meditate," he says in writing his two poems about Lady Gregory and her country house, "upon an aged woman and her house." What are the leading virtues of this lady and her house? "Great works constructed there in nature's spite," "Beloved books that famous hands have bound, Old marble heads, old pictures everywhere." In the midst of these poems, the poet always remembers how precarious is the existence of such a society:

> And maybe the great-grandson of that house,
> For all its bronze and marble, 's but a mouse.

And this awareness is usually accompanied by the feeling that the fate of poetry is inseparable from the fate of that society, so that, when he returns to Coole Park after Lady Gregory has died, where "whatever most can bless The mind of man or elevate a rhyme" was composed with the help of her hospitality, he finds everything altered:

> But all is changed, that high horse riderless,
> Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
> Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood.

The fact that he was to say three years later in prose that the past sixty years have been a very great period of poetry contradicts that sentiment only if we forget the context in which it is felt, the end of the society in which Yeats came to be a poet.

Then there is one short poem called "The Dolls," another symbol for Yeats of the artificial and unnatural object which is art and not life. In this poem, when the doll-maker's wife has a child, the dolls scream that the house has been disgraced by the filthy thing which the child is, and the doll-maker's wife apologizes humbly to the guilty doll-maker who has been shamed by the dolls: she tells him the child was an accident. The hatred of the natural and the biological in this poem is obviously related to a like obsession in the poetry of T. S. Eliot — it is the same "birth, copulation, death" which the poet abhors — and there is also the connection with the opposition of Art and Life in Thomas Mann, which is the significant inheritance of all the writers who came to maturity during the first decade of the present century. In another famous poem, "Among School Children," the poet turns from the children to the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

image of the beautiful woman he has loved all his life (the identity of the beautiful woman and the work of art had been established in the earliest poems) in the distortion of old age; and in his anger at old age and the changes of life, he sees all philosophy as a denial of Nature and time, he compares a mother's love of the living child with the nun's love of a bronze image, preferring the nun's love to the mother's, and he concludes by calling before his mind with longing a realm where process — and history — do not exist.

The substance of the later poetry is, then, the *emotion* of the Poet as Poet (in the romantic sense) when faced with modern times, when forced to exist and to practice his art in the circumstances of the last forty years. If every generalization is bound to omit or to distort, and if this must be especially so of a generalization about the work of a poet, yet, in terms of this emphasis, the nature of the shift from the early to the later style becomes entirely plain. Yeats shifted from the effort to write the "poetic" poetry of the 'Nineties to the concern, as poet, with what it was to be a poet amid the alien circumstances of his age. That is why he is so often, in his later poetry, writing about the artists, scholars, and beautiful women he has known, and their unfortunate lives. And that is perhaps why the unknown instructors or spirits who dictated a supernatural system to him through the mediumship of his wife, and prompted Yeats to offer to use the rest of his life explicating what had been dictated, rejected his offer, saying: "No, we have come to give you metaphors for poetry." Those spirits, it is certain, recognized their man. The poet intent upon Art so exhausted his intention and learned so much about that intention from others who were of like mind that his poetry became a revelation of the fate of Art and the emotion of the Artist in modern history. The will to seek one's opposite, the doctrine that one must seek one's anti-self, is at once the method by means of which Yeats found his genuine and peculiar theme, and one more example of the concern with acting a part which flows from the obsession with Art. The result has been a group of poems which will be known as long as the English language exists.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Extract from "Autumn Journal"

Louis MacNeice

Spider, spider, twisting tight—
  But the watch is wary beneath the pillow—
I am afraid in the web of night
  When the window is fingered by the shadows of
    branches
When the lions roar beneath the hill
  And the meter clicks and the cistern bubbles
And the gods are absent and the men are still—
  Noli me tangere, my soul is forfeit.
Some now are happy in the hive of home,
  Thigh over thigh and a light in the night nursery,
And some are hungry under the starry dome
  And some sit turning handles.
Glory to God in the Lowest, peace beneath the earth,
  Dumb and deaf at the nadir;
I wonder now whether anything is worth
  The eyelid opening and the mind recalling.
And I think of Persephone gone down to dark,
  No more a virgin, gone the garish meadow,
But why must she come back, why must the snowdrop
    mark
  That life goes on for ever?
There are nights when I am lonely and long for love
  But to-night is quintessential dark forbidding
Anyone beside or below me; only above
  Pile high the tumulus, good-bye to starlight.
Good-bye the Platonic sieve of the Carnal Man
  But good-bye also Plato's philosophising;
I have a better plan

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To hit the target straight without circumlocution.
If you can equate Being in its purest form
With denial of all appearance,
Then let me disappear—the scent grows warm
For pure Not-Being, Nirvana.
Only the spider spinning out his reams
Of colourless thread says Only there are always
Interlopers, dreams,
Who let no dead dog lie nor death be final;
Suggesting, while he spins, that to-morrow will outweigh
To-night, that Becoming is a match for Being,
That to-morrow is also a day,
That I must leave my bed and face the music.
As all the others do who with a grin
Shake off sleep like a dog and hurry to desk or engine
And the fear of life goes out as they clock in
And history is reasserted.
Spider, spider, your irony is true;
Who am I—or I—to demand oblivion?
I must go out to-morrow as the others do
And build the falling castle;
Which has never fallen, thanks
Not to any formula, red tape or institution,
Not to any creeds or banks,
But to the human animal's endless courage.
Spider, spider, spin
Your register and let me sleep a little,
Not now in order to end but to begin
The task begun so often.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Art Chronicle

AMERICAN ARTISTS' CONGRESS:
Third Annual Exhibition, New York.

THE Artists' Congress offers perhaps the broadest opportunity for appraising various influences that are now shaping the more popular courses of American art. And there are indications of greater promise in this 1939 Exhibition than one is accustomed to discover from large-scale displays at the present time. The native selections at the Metropolitan and Whitney Museums have long created a suspicion that American bourgeois art was fated to become permanently stuck in a lifeless morass of expanding vulgarity, and most local exhibitions have merely added to this unpalatable picture. At the Artists' Congress, however, there is an absence of impressionist trickery, and a refreshing directness which might conceivably vitalize a genuine tradition. There is often a surprising technical freedom as well, and a pleasure in the manipulation of direct impasto. No quality is more readily communicated than that of drudgery, and it is perhaps significant that in this show the leading exponents of drudgery are usually those artists whom we encounter most often in the public galleries.

The favorable impression would have been more successfully sustained if the galleries had been less generously provided with chairs. One must pause at length before a picture to know it, and unfortunately there was little here that could stand a very intimate acquaintance. Many works disclosed the striking transcription of a momentary image, but that real distinction which our century seems so rarely capable of realizing, was singularly absent. There was little to suggest the stirring of an esthetic impulse; the political earnestness had obviously thrown its weight in the opposite direction.

Works of every genre were in evidence, but the Congress exhibitions derive their special character from a preponderance of paintings that might be loosely classified as "social satires." Here, at any rate, they tended to eclipse all other types of work; at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

same time they serve to demonstrate the unavoidable effect of violent subject-matter upon artists who have never become grounded on an authentic tradition of their own. The very language of painting by which literary ideas can be made plastically credible, has been laid aside; therefore, the more intense the illustrative emotion, the more it has appeared to stick through the structural fabric, until often the connection between title and expressive means would become quite arbitrary. A painting here entitled *Refugees* could have passed many years ago for a peculiarly romantic *Madonna and Child*. And one particular work, *Flight from Fascism*, went so far as to take its pose and composition quite blatantly from Delacroix's *Flight of Medea*.

AMERICAN ABSTRACT ARTISTS:
Third Annual Exhibition, New York.

An Exhibition of almost equal proportions, although in complete opposition to that of the Congress, was held in March by the American Abstract Artists, and the resultant impressions are naturally interesting to compare. The slogan of the Congress is *For Peace, For Democracy, For Cultural Progress*, and obvious comments upon these phrases echo resoundingly from every wall. The Abstract Artists share these convictions, but they also believe that the esthetic impulse cannot become a tool for concrete political or philosophical dissemination,—at this stage of our cultural metamorphosis at least. In their galleries the emphasis contracts upon rudimentary encounters with pattern and design; there is a consistent searching after such shapes and linear combinations as can hold those conceptions of individuality which they feel to be evolving anew. The present decade may have publicized at last the cracks in the old social order. The Congress illustrates the crevices. The abstract artists, on the other hand, attempt to re-order their plastic instincts; they attack the established conceptions of art itself.

The emergence of a sudden and intense restriction has often in the past accompanied the painful processes of cultural reörientation. It can hardly have been by accident that another age of chaos, which saw the disintegration of the Roman Empire, should have left the Ravenna mosaics as its purest heritage. Possibly it requires an impasse comparable to that in which the world finds itself today to give courage for that complete restriction which has made possible the work of many abstract artists. The pitfalls are many which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

await the processes of consciously attempted simplification. Particularly in an age of science and mechanism the artist can be lured into reproducing no more than the static technique of the manufactured object. Such painters as Shaw, Gallatin, and Greene have concentrated upon every direction that their flattened forms can follow, every linear juncture, every weight of tone and color, without relinquishing the essentially personal stylistic overmeaning. Their works are reticent, for their expressive ends have purposely been carried no farther than their simplified fabric will allow. Yet through such limited means they have destroyed the old conception of the "picture"; each has substituted a *thing*,—an object that is at rest completely,—and thus some day can a way be cleared for a new reality.

GEORGE L. K. MORRIS

DRYBURGH ABBEY

The stone walls, roofless and broken, lie open in the light.
In the corridors and chancels the grass grows, and the sun stands.
At the place of the high altar, rock is hairy with ivy
And the moss moves with shadow and shine over, over,
Soft on the column drums. Church hewn by hands,
In a hundred and a hundred and a hundred and a hundred years
Lies split, stilled, ended, laced to the earth, beautiful.
Beautiful and quiet because it is broken, roofless, sundered.

We are not mocked; this is true, means what it means—
The larks fly through these upright Gothic ribs,
This skeleton the sun reclaims, the grass makes good.

WINFIELD TOWNLEY SCOTT

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Only Son

James T. Farrell

It was Patrick McMurtrie's twenty-first birthday. Father, mother, and son sat down to supper. Mrs. McMurtrie was a lean woman with tannish, rough skin. Her face seemed always drawn, her expression changelessly tight and sad, her bony hands work-worn. The father was a gruff looking little man with a weather-beaten and wind-roughened face, the result of his years of work in the building trades. He was now working as a foreman on a building that was going up. The boy was medium sized, with a sensitive face, blue eyes, curly brown hair, and slightly hollowed cheeks. All day, the mother had been waiting for this moment. She had spent three times as long as usual in puttering about the kitchen and cooking the same kind of a supper that she prepared every evening.

She blessed herself, bowed her head, and said grace, both father and son waiting in boredom while she performed this ritual. She always did the serving, and she served her son first, giving him a large cut of the thick steak she had fried, and then, filling his plate with potatoes and other vegetables. The father looked on silent and dour, watching her pass the plate to her son.

"Now you can serve the poor relation," he said as she started to serve him.

His remark passed unheeded, but Patrick frowned. They began eating.

"Well now that you're a man, with your schooling finished, and your fine college degree signed, sealed, and paid for, you can start paying back your old man the money he's spent making you so smart and highly educated. Maybe you'll start repaying your father and mother for what they've done for you and for the fine education they've given you," the father said, speaking slowly and with undue casualness as he ate.

Patrick did not reply. This was the old man's regular line.

"Joseph, why in the name of God would you be talking to your

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

son like that, and this his birthday. You know that now the boy is working, he'll be giving us back everything we've given him, and with interest," Mrs. McMurtrie said.

"Of course he will," the father said with a note of irony in his voice. "I was just thinking out loud," he added.

They ate on in silence. It seemed as though the mother would cry, but no tears came. Patrick was uncomfortable. He wanted to be over with the meal, and to be out of the house and with Sarah. The strained atmosphere at the dinner table was not unusual to him. It was a replica of what happened nearly every night. The old man hated him. There was no love between his father and mother. For years now he had known his father as a dour and bitter man, hating everything about his home, always making sarcastic remarks, constantly starting family squabbles. And for years now also, he had known his mother as a sad and spiritless woman, fanatically religious, always seeming to suffer from the sharp gibes of her husband, sometimes fighting back, sometimes bearing herself with a painfully martyred expression on her face as if she were just going into a lion's den to die for her faith. He looked on her. That same expression. His mother embarrassed him. She loved him with such possessiveness.

Patrick's father always looked for something in the son's conduct which could be used against the mother. Patrick often looked upon himself as a kind of family no man's land. He remembered how ever since he was a boy this had gone on, with fighting and the old man's drinking. But in those days he had been innocent and afraid of his father. Even so, he had quietly detested him. Now, he did not detest his father. He was, at times, even sorry for the old man. Often, he was contemptuous of him. And his mother, she embarrassed him. She was so damned religious, and demanded that he be the same. Every Sunday, he had to go to Mass with her. For years now, he had been fulfilling his religious duties, even to the reception of Holy Communion, only to please his mother. His hypocrisy often disgusted him. But he could not bring himself to tell his mother that he was an atheist. She was such a sad woman. She had so little in life to which she could cling. And then, it would give the old man a trump card to play against her. The father always said that he had no education, and that the son's education had served to make him into a heathen and a snob, who soon wouldn't act as if he even knew his old parents.

Suddenly, while they were eating, Mrs. McMurtrie began to cry. Her husband sarcastically asked why she was crying. She

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

answered that it was because she was so happy.

"Joseph, remember when Patrick was a little gossoon, and you would be so often taking him to the park, and there he would be chasing the squirrels. Patrick, my son, you always loved to chase the squirrels, and you couldn't say squirrel. You would always call them, 'quirrels.' You'd come home with your father and tell me of the great time you had, chasing the 'quirrels'," she said.

"Yes mother," Patrick said, striving not to show that he was bored.

"Ah woman, will you forget that talk. That's all happened years ago, and what's the good in remembering it all of the time. Tell me, do I ever hear anything out of you but when he was a little gossoon?"

"And son," she went on, ignoring her husband. "You were the good little fellow. On Sundays often, I would dress you up in your Sunday clothes, and take you to mass with me, and sometimes, I'd be taking you to see your Aunt Ellen, Lord have mercy on her soul. Yes, 'tis proud of you I'd be then. And now you're a fine young man, and it's prouder I am of you. And Lord have mercy on me, but how you would cry for ice cream when you were at your Aunt Ellen's. I wish she could be here with us now to see the fine young man you have become. But the Lord took her."

"Yes, and whenever you cried for ice cream, you'd get it too," the father said.

"Why Joseph!" she exclaimed, shocked.

"You always spoiled him by giving him everything he asked for. Is it any wonder he reads the books I see around here?" the father said.

"There's nothing wrong with the books I read," Patrick said.

"No, there's nothing wrong with Darwin, and men coming from monkeys and all that high and mighty nonsense. No, nothing wrong with heathen books," the father said.

"You don't know anything about the books I bring home and read," Patrick said.

"See, Mary! Did you hear what he said to me! Many's the time, woman, that I warned you you were spoiling him. Here's the fruit of your willfulness. Here we save all our life to educate him, and how does he repay us? He calls his father ignorant. So we're ignorant now?" the father said, and suddenly he turned from the mother and faced Patrick. "Well my lad, it's not ignorant I'd be if I spent the money educating myself that I spent on you and your miseducation. Coming home now that you're a college gradu-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ate and acting like a snob!" He turned back and with a melodramatic gesture of the right arm, he said, "Woman, I warned you!"

"Oh quit putting on a show and acting as if I were still a two year old," Patrick said.

"Son, you must not be saying such things to your father. If he provokes you or not, he's your father," the mother said.

"Hell, I didn't ask him to be," Patrick said, disgusted.

"Patrick son!" the mother exclaimed in that injured martyr-like tone of voice that she so frequently used.

"Mary McMurtrie, before he dies, he'll disown his old father," Joseph McMurtrie said solemnly, shaking his finger as he spoke.

"Well from the way you go on, you'd think you're a section boss here at home, and I'm one of the hunkies working for you," Patrick said.

Patrick hadn't meant to answer his father's provocation. The answer had come against his will and his determination as it so often did.

"See Mary McMurtrie! It's your doin'! See, he's twenty-one now and been to college, and right away, he knows it all. Pretty soon, he'll be too good to deign to live in the same flat with us. He'll be leaving us ignorant old greenhorns. He'll be leaving us to go and marry that whore he runs around with," the father said, speaking with a bitterness that seemed to rise out of the depths of his being.

"Listen! Cut that out! You hear me!" Patrick said, blanching with anger.

"Well then show a little respect for your father," McMurtrie said, changing his tone of voice when he perceived the reaction he had produced in his son.

"People should do something in this world to earn respect," Patrick shot back at his father.

Patrick warned himself to exert more self-control. He understood more than his father did. He shouldn't let his old man get him so sore. With understanding, things should take on a different light. He knew that his father was jealous of him, bitter, unhappy, and that the old man had never loved his mother. Understanding these things, sensing causes underlying his father's conduct, he should take his father's words in stride. But damn it, it was too thick. The old hypocritical fathead calling Sarah a whore!

The father had been eyeing his son closely, and observed a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

change as if Patrick were softening while these reflections hastily passed through his mind.

"I'm boss in this house, and I want a little respect shown me! She's a whore anyway. What other kind of a girl could she be, sleeping with you?" the father said.

The old man couldn't stand anybody else having any enjoyment or happiness in life, Patrick told himself, now determined to maintain his self control.

"Saint Joseph pray for me," the mother exclaimed woefully as a response to what her husband had just said.

"Watch what you're saying," Patrick said to his father.

"As long as this is my house, don't ever bring that woman of yours into it," the father said.

"Mother of God, protect my son from evil companions," the mother said.

"How do you know she'd want to come here?" Patrick said.

"Why should she? Why in the name of God should she be wanting to come into a decent household?" the father said.

"What the hell decency is there in this house?" Patrick asked, disgust rising above his efforts at self-control.

Shaking, the father rose and pointed an accusing finger at Patrick.

"Out of my house, you young cur!" the father said.

"My son is not going to be put out of this house. Not while I breathe the breath of life," the mother said.

Mrs. McMurtrie clasped her hands and silently prayed while tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Goddamn you!" Patrick said, flinging out each syllable.

"I hope that God will never give you or that whore of yours a decent day as long as you live!" McMurtrie said.

Patrick walked out of the room.

II

Patrick sat in his bedroom with his door closed so that he could not hear his father and mother fighting. It was a small room, with books scattered around it, and holy pictures on the walls. Right over the bed, there was a framed picture of the bleeding Sacred Heart. No, he didn't want to hear them talking and scrapping. It was often a puzzle to him that his old man never got bored with the sound of his own voice uttering the same complaints against his mother that he had been uttering for years and years in their squabbling. He never seemed able to probe down to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what seemed to him the real reason for his father's hatred and jealousy. What had happened in the old man's life to cause this? He knew that the old man had never been happy with his mother. And he could understand that. Who would want her for a wife? Who would want to sleep with her? As far back as he could remember, she had always been the same. The same religious fanaticism. The same air of sadness and tiredness. She could give any man the creeps. She had always made both him and his father feel that their home was populated with death. Always images of the same suffering Christ on the cross plastered all around the house! He looked around the room at the holy picture. Christ was suffering over his dresser. All of the pictures were cheap and banal. Assuming that there was a God, these pictures were a disservice to Him and to His supposedly True Faith. They made Him out as no more of a character than his own father and mother, or than some ignorant Irish priest. He couldn't get at the bottom of his old man. Perhaps, the old man hadn't wanted to marry her? Perhaps the old man hadn't wanted a kid? He didn't know. The old man was jealous of him now because he was young, had gotten a little education, and might have a different kind of a life.

How many times hadn't his old man come rolling home drunk? But always, his father had turned on respectability like a fountain to use in arguments with him. Yes, his father was a damned old hypocrite. Both his father and his mother were failures in life. They were mismated and they had botched their lives. Neither of them had ever seemed to be happy, except when his mother was smothering him with affection or praying, or when his old man was drunk with his cronies in a saloon or speakeasy. They were trying in their own way to drag him down to their own level. And he wouldn't be dragged down. He wouldn't! They were failures at living. They were going to make the same thing out of him if he let them. His mother wanted him to settle down into a successful nonentity. Well he wouldn't. He didn't have much of a job, but he would do something, make something out of his life. He didn't know what, but he would. Because he was out of college, he wasn't going to give up studying and trying to think. He was his mother's excuse for living. Somehow, he hated to hurt her. He didn't care about hurting his father. But she seemed so tragic a figure. Did she ever smile? Did she ever enjoy herself? Just looking at her suggested to him something of the cause of his father's bitterness.

He did things that he hated himself for doing, just because of his mother. Once a month, or once every two months, just to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

satisfy her, he said that he had gone to confession, and then, when she went to mass with him, he received Holy Communion. Sacrilege! It caused no fear, no terror in his soul. His non-existent soul, he added with a smile. He asked himself were there many others in America doing the same thing as he was doing? Were there others with mothers and fathers such as his, and were they compromising themselves and their dignity in their own eyes by pretending to be Catholics, receiving the Sacraments of the Church sacrilegiously in order to preserve a little domestic peace and to nurture the illusions of older people!

Just now, his old man had gotten him damned sore when he had slandered Sarah. He loved Sarah, and he would live with her all his life. He wanted to marry her now, but she always counselled him to wait because neither of them had much money, and because of his home situation. What the hell business did the old man have saying what he'd said about her? Sarah was unlike any one he had ever known. And the old bastard calling her a *whore*! It was only self-control that had saved his father from getting something that he hadn't in the least bargained for. And what was going to happen when he did marry? He could see his father and mother alone in this house, eating themselves away with unhappiness and mutual hatred while they lived on waiting only to die. There they would be, each getting older, the old man becoming more and more bitter, the old lady growing more and more sad. She would throw anything she could in the way of his marrying Sarah. She would fight with all means to keep her son to herself. And it was clearly a case of who should be the one that was to be sacrificed? He or his mother? He and Sarah, rather, or else his mother? Why was it this way? Why did life have to be this way? Why did parents have to cling to their children like drowning persons clinging and clutching a lifeline for dear life itself. All damned fool banal questions he was asking himself, and yet they were real, and they cut through the very fibres of his life at this very moment. It was all more than he could make out. He stood up and told himself that he was twenty one, and that technically, he had reached manhood's estate. He had to be a man. He had to walk over his mother's unhappiness and misery, or else, he couldn't be a man.

To thine own self be true . . .

He quoted the line with seriousness and determination. He wouldn't be just a dutiful son and a nonentity in an office all his life. He vowed that he wouldn't.

He dropped back on his bed, and reflected that what was the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

worst feature of this whole situation was that there was no solution to it. No matter how he thought it out, no matter how much he understood of the motives of his father and mother, and of his own motives for that matter, where did his understanding lead him to? It could not reduce one bit the pain and the agony and sorrow of it. He could not give up Sarah without suffering intensely. If he did that, he would have no heart to go on, to go on and fight to make something decent out of his life, to go on and rise above the ranks of mediocrity. With her, he might work, go to night school, study law, and make a career for himself. That was a plan he had been thinking about. And if he did not give up Sarah, what about his mother? It was painful to think of his mother and father in this house alone, waiting to die after he had left them. And Hell, what was it now to live here? And where was it getting any of the three of them? *What* was it getting them? Look at the scene at supper time tonight. And there they were going at one another now in the dining room.

He sat on the bed, glum. He heard his father slam the front door. The old man would come home drunk to raise hell tonight, he told himself.

III

Patrick was ready to leave when his mother entered the room. She clutched him fiercely.

"You're all that I have. My son! My son! My baby boy that I nursed. My baby!"

Held in an embrace by his mother, Patrick felt almost physically ill.

She kissed his forehead.

"I have to go, Mother. I got to meet a fellow and I'm late and keeping him waiting on a street corner," he said.

Jealousy flashed in her eyes.

"Is it a lad you're meeting?"

"Why, of course Mother," he said, thinking to himself that she probably was sure that he was going to see Sarah.

"Patrick, you wouldn't lie to your mother?"

"You know I wouldn't, Mother. Why should I?"

And while he said this, he thought to himself that she forced him to lie to her; she had forced him to lie to her for years and years now. And she didn't know it, didn't know that it was impossible to tell her the truth about almost everything that he really felt or believed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wiping away a tear, she stood before him like a personification of desolation. That goddamn look of hers! Always that way! Always having to look at her standing there so silent, so injured, and so sorrowful. He could understand a great deal about his father, just by seeing her now, standing there before him.

Suddenly, she drew a pair of rosary beads from her pocket. They were expensive, with a solid gold crucifix. She held them before him with great pride.

He waited for her to say something.

"For my son on this twenty-first birthday, from his mother," she said, and her smile was a miserable effort.

"Gee, thanks Mother! But you shouldn't have done that for me. They're expensive," he said.

"I had them blessed," she said.

She was so damned unfair and foolish, he reflected. And the pity of her was that she didn't even know. And giving him rosary beads! His mother was a fool.

"Son, never lose your religion. God is good. Never lose your faith in him," she said in a strained voice.

Again she wiped a tear away. Patrick was moved to pity his mother. But he was unable to express his emotion to her. And he dared not. If he did, then, that only served to make the tie between her and himself the more intolerable. And so often, the ties which held flesh and blood together were so artificial. This realization made him hate all society, because it was society that kept firm these artificial ties. And just look at the hopelessness it had made in his home.

He put his straw hat on, and waited, anxious to get out, acutely uncomfortable here with his mother.

"Son, tell me the truth! Are you going to see that girl?"

"Why mother, I told you I was going to see a fellow, and go to a movie with him."

"Son, she might be a nice girl, but she's not for you. I'm your mother and I know it," she said.

Patrick did not answer her.

"Patrick, isn't there a nice Catholic girl you grew up with that you could take out now and again?" she said.

"Mother, I'm late. And I'm going to be busy because I'm going to night school and study law in the fall. I won't be able to bother about girls," he said, feeling that he should blurt right out and tell her, force the issue into a showdown; but he was unable to force himself to do just that.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Patrick, you do bother about that girl. I know you do. I can tell it. I'm your mother, and no one knows you better than your mother. I have been seeing how different you are since you've known that girl. I tell you this for your own good."

He asked himself why didn't he just tell her to mind her damned business?

"Son, you won't be having your mother with you always. You should stay in with me some nights. And that's little I'm asking of you," she said.

"Mother, I got to go," he said.

Whether she did it purposefully or not, he wasn't sure, but she always succeeded in making him feel so damned guilty. And guilty of what? Just of trying to be himself and live his own life.

"I'll be home early," he said, unable to bear that look of hers.

She kissed him passionately, and he left. At the door, he turned and said goodbye to her with what sympathy he could force into his voice.

"Goodbye," she said, again with all that sadness in her voice, saying it as if she were bidding him farewell for the final time in this world.

From the window, she watched him disappear down the street. She sat alone, rocking in the darkened parlor, tears filling her eyes.

IV

Walking to the street car, Patrick thought gloomily that things would go on without any change just as long as they three lived together. If his mother died, what then? It would be better if she died first. If his father went first, he'd be left with her around his neck, depending on him, using every sentimentality offered to her by society to keep herself like a chain holding him at her level. Unless he wanted to continue going through such suppers and scenes as that of tonight's, he had only one path to choose—to leave. And he couldn't do that while his mother lived. He knew that he couldn't. If she would only die. Death would be best for her. He thought of Sarah. Suddenly, he was fearful to the point of dread. He and Sarah would get married, and one day they would be old, and one of them would die and leave the other behind. But that was years away. And they wouldn't grow old together like his mother and father had. They would build a free and beautiful life together. They would!

On the street car, he accidentally put his hand into his coat

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pocket, and felt the rosary beads that his mother had given him. He drew his hand out as if he had touched something disgusting. The beads brought him back to thoughts of his mother just when he had happily dismissed her from his mind. He thought of the meaning of her religion to her. It was all that she had. Her faith in him gave her nothing but misery, and earned from him nothing but annoyance and contempt and a kind of sympathy that would be insulting to any dignified human being. He hated her religion. Yet it did her good, saved her from utter misery and loneliness. He didn't care, he hated it! People had to learn to be brave and free, to face what life flung at them, and not weakly to ask the consolation of religion. But there she was. She came from a different world than he, and a different country, and she was a lone, forlorn woman in the present world. Yes, death would be gentle to her, a smooth, rippling, sleepy approach into darkness. And it would produce an irony that she would never experience. There was no waking after death, and she would die, and she would not wake up in any Heaven. She would die, and there would be no more of her, and all her dreary life would have been in vain. He wanted to revolt against it all. Life was a lousy business. You had to stand up to the whole lousy business, he told himself with feeling and passion. Goddamn it, he would!

But he was going to Sarah. And when he and Sarah were married and they had children, they would raise them intelligently, intelligently and free from all that he had been raised in. He vowed that he would. He had no God to Whom he could vow. He vowed it to himself. Sarah! She was so lovely. And once with her, now, he would tell her all that happened, tell her all that he had been thinking.

The car stopped and he got off. He was going to Sarah now, and all of his home life would drop from his mind for a little while, and he would find joy and love with her. He walked briskly, a young man on his way to see his girl.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Hands of Jeanne-Marie

Arthur Rimbaud

These are the hands of Jeanne-Marie,
These are the hands of Jeanne, not Juanna.
These are dark hands, mysterious,
And powerful, and tan as summer.

How were the hands of Jeanne-Marie
Burnt to marvellous brunette?
What cosmetic seas were fathomed?
What dark pools were drained for pigments?

Did they swim through barbarous skies
With soft stroke of charming knees?
Have they rolled and rolled cigars,
Handled drastic diamonds?

On the warm breasts of Madonnas
Have they blistered golden flowers?
The blood of belladonnas surely
Sleeps and pulses in their palms.

Huntresses of diptera?
Experimenters in auroras
For the indigo of nectars?
Have they served as flasks for poisons?

O what eternal dream has seized them
With strange pandiculations?
What never accomplished dream of Asias,
Of invasions, Khans, Zions?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Have they perhaps been laundering
The shorts of uncontrollable boys?
No. These hands have not sold idols,
Incense, figs, oranges.

These are not congenial fingers
Like some workman's, swollen, raw,
Good for shaking hands—however
Maculately gloved in tar.

These are the hands of Jeanne-Marie,
Designed to dislocate and black,
To split spines and darken skulls,
Like machines, accurate,

Carboning like furnaces,
Blasting shudderings away,
Their flesh chants the mysteries
Rhythmed by the Marseillaise!

These hands will take your delicate
White elbows, ladies, in their hands!
They are stranglers, they exult
Like Othellos at your throats!

Glittering, imperious,
In their exquisite phalanges
Spots of sunlight set like rubies
Frighten madmen, delight children.

Hands tanned, nicotined,
By violent breasts, smoking lips,
By the passionate, lighthearted
Men of Paris in revolt!

Once they were marvellously pale—
When the sun of love looked down
Across precarious barricades
And lit the bronze of riflemen.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ah, sometimes, sacred hands,
At your wrists, where our lips
Utter with despair and pride
A chain of clearly linked cries,

Sometimes, sacred hands, we dream
That neither death nor history
Can bleed a single freckle from
Your perfect fingers, drained of blood.

(*Translated by Lionel Abel*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

John Dewey's Achievement

Eliseo Vivas

THERE ARE many indications that we are witnessing a more thorough break in the philosophical tradition of the West than that which took place in the days of Galileo and Descartes. Or perhaps what is taking place is only the completion of that break, the snapping of the last strings which tie us to an incubus of dead errors. In any case no one in our day has done as much as John Dewey to accelerate the process and to point the direction which future thought must take. The pre-eminence he has achieved and the reaction which still greets his writing derives from this fact. Dewey's quarrel with the history of philosophy is radical. We are not able to make sense of what he writes until we realize that his strictures on our tradition are based on his complete rejection of it. He does not deny the solutions which have been proposed but the problems themselves, because he repudiates the assumptions from which they spring. Most of the current criticisms of Dewey's philosophy can be traced to failure to realize how radically subversive is his thought. Readers whose quarrel with our philosophical tradition is superficial read him in the light of their own luke-warm aims and pitifully miss his thrust. In recoil they attribute to Dewey a confusion which really exists in their own minds, and which is inevitable in any one who attempts to read him in terms of traditional viewpoints which Dewey has abandoned.

Dewey's dissatisfaction with the tradition of Western philosophy is to be traced, at least in part, to Hegel, from whom he gathered, as Mead pointed out, a deep aversion to dualism. But it has a more important source in his grasp of the implications of Darwin for philosophy. It has been generally conceded that Darwin dealt the *coup de grace* to the other-worldliness of our Western tradition by opening the question of the origin of man to scientific study. But few thinkers besides Dewey have realized how deep-going are the implications of the theory of evolution for epistemol-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ogy and for logic. Dewey saw that if we take the species to be in continuous process of evolution there is no valid reason for not applying to the understanding of man's highest interests the same techniques and procedures, the same method, used with so much success at the inanimate and biological level. And he also saw that when mind is conceived as an instrument of survival, an interpretation of knowledge grounded on the notion of mind as mirror of reality becomes obsolete. The elaborate development of these suggestions constitutes Dewey's chief contribution to philosophy. He has demonstrated that the basic dualisms of our thought, which are so deeply institutionalized in our material and moral life, have their origin in the primitive science of the Greeks. Ancient science was an honest and roughly satisfactory expression of the intellectual needs of the slave-holding aristocracy which created it; but it is hopelessly unsuitable for our needs. And while everybody but the Thomists has abandoned it, the philosophy which grew out of it is still intact and implicitly in daily use in the schools and in the streets.

Dewey's objection to dualism is no mere prejudice. He is deeply convinced that dualism invariably develops into duplicity, for theoretical splits sustain divorces in practice. If modern culture has failed to bring forth its promise, if the brass knuckles of the barbarians threaten us at every turn, from the theoretical standpoint the reason for both failure and threat is to be found in the separation between our practical and our spiritual needs. The divorce allows our practice to be guided by the principles and techniques of the pirate and the slave runner, while our ideals, like chlorotic virgins, are immured in the sterilized nunneries of our Art and our Higher Thought.

Dewey does not mean that our theory is the sole efficient cause of our material troubles. On the contrary he has sought to show how the theory of a culture is rooted in its material soil. But my image is inadequate, for he recognizes that theory should guide action, and if we are going to make our world into a fit habitation for human life lived in dignity and in freedom, the theory that now guides us must be scrapped. "The basic problem of our time," he tells us in his last book, "is that of effecting integration where division now exists." He has told us that the problem is not a purely theoretical one. But he knows that it can not be resolved satisfactorily if we shirk the purely intellectual task of re-examining critically and without sentimental piety the basic elements of our conception of the world.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

2

The classical conception of knowledge assumes that intellectual activity is the result of a pure disinterested curiosity with which men are naturally endowed; but what is the source of that curiosity it does not attempt to tell us. "Men by nature desire to know," says Aristotle, and there is no sense in asking why: that is the way we are. On this theory the defining function of mind is pure contemplative activity. Whatever their differences, on this point all philosophers, whether idealistic or materialistic, agree. But when the function of mind is thus conceived, *the objects* of knowledge are taken to be fixed and complete affairs: they are eternal structures or objects existing independently of the inquiry which reveals them; and *the objective* of knowledge is taken to be the grasping of these "eternal essences of things."

Sharply contrasted with this view is the evolutionary conception of mind. For the latter, mind "has its origin in biological adaptive behavior and the ultimate function of its cognitive aspects is a prospective control of the conditions of the environment." We do not start thinking prodded by the spontaneous stimulus of a pure curiosity, which seeks to grasp a static reality behind the deceptive flux. We think in order to resolve difficulties or "problematic situations" that obstruct our on-going activity. In order to do so we devise hypotheses with the aid of hints gathered from somewhat similar situations successfully resolved in the past. A hypothesis is a hunch, addressed to resolving the difficulty out of which it grew, and is therefore tested against the situation by carrying out the activities it suggests. If these resolve the difficulty, the hypothesis works, and is said to be true. We value the result of our thinking in so far as it stimulates, guides, and serves to check further inquiry. This is true of both scientists and ordinary men. They make hypotheses, do not *discover* pre-existing traits. The picture which either common sense or science paints of nature has meaning only in terms of the procedures by means of which it is constructed; and far from being fixed, it is in a state of constant transformation. The scientist does not accept his results because they fit neatly into an already constructed picture or because they approximate more closely the true nature of reality. When he makes the assertion that that is what he is after, it can clearly be shown that he is interpreting his modern practice in the light of the Greek theory of knowledge. The reason why he accepts his results is that they enable him to anticipate with accuracy events in which he is interested. *The objective* of his inquiry is control, and *its objects* are the formulas by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

means of which he achieves it. But the formulas are not a picture of objective reality. They are not only relative to the practical function they fulfill but are also relative to the operations and the instruments by means of which the scientist arrives at them. In the practice of modern science "knowledge is an affair of making sure, not of grasping antecedently given sureties."

Although the primary function of knowledge is practical, once enjoyed it is often sought for its own sake, and only then does it develop beyond a purely utilitarian activity of limited scope and application. But no matter how elaborate and far reaching our knowledge may get to be, the criterion of its truth remains the ability of the hypothesis to resolve the difficulties which gave rise to the inquiry. It is of course true that as knowers we seek consistency and are thus led to systematize our theories. Elegance and logical simplicity are important factors in scientific formulations. But the internal consistency of scientific theories and their elegance and simplicity are sacrificed to their relevance. The criteria of truth are successful prediction and control.

When the traditional philosopher is confronted with this analysis of knowledge he falls back on logic as a field on which it can not be applied. Scientific method, he tells us, may partly be accounted for in terms of the instrumentalist theory. But not altogether. For obviously instrumentalism leaves out of account the formal canons —the so called "laws" of thought, and the principles of inference— by means of which we regulate the operations of our understanding in empirical as well as in purely deductive thinking. And it must be granted that the failure to account satisfactorily for the formal disciplines has been one of the most serious weaknesses of traditional empiricism; and conversely the claim to account for them has been one of the strongest arguments in favor of rationalism.

Rationalists argue that the canons of thought cannot have their origin in experience, for if they did they would have to share the contingent character which stains all that comes from experience. And yet the conclusions of mathematics and the inferences of formal logic are necessary, not contingent. Or less cryptically stated: If the principles of thought are contingent, they can not be *regulative principles* at all; and it follows that thinking can not claim any validity whatsoever. But there are necessarily valid inferences in logic and mathematics, and there are basic principles, like the laws of identity and contradiction, on which we can not cast doubts. These cannot have their source in experience if they are to be capable of regulating our knowledge. Empiricism is therefore an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

incomplete philosophy; it is necessary to postulate a realm of fixed and immutable reality beyond experience. And this is the ground for asserting a complete break between logic and scientific method. The former deals with the immutable principles of thought, and its sphere is the realm of the necessary; while the latter deals with the facts of experience, and can never give us anything better than contingent truths. This in turn is the reason why we may trust "speculative philosophy" or "metaphysics," a discipline which claims to be governed by the pure "laws" of thought, and hence is completely independent of the techniques of verification employed in the empirical sciences.

Dewey's elaborate answer to this argument is to be found in his recently published *Logic*.* Although to a great extent it is but a restatement and development of conceptions found in previous books and articles, the publication of the *Logic* is an extremely significant event in the history of contemporary philosophy, since it represents the most uncompromising effort to show that within a naturalistic and empirical conception of the world and of knowledge a place can be found for the subject matter of formal logic. Dewey argues that the formal principles of thought need not be derived from a source beyond experience, for logic has never been and need not be more than the theory of our knowing activity. It was so for the Greeks. Whatever the means they thought they employed to elicit the principles of their logic, they really got them empirically, through an analysis of their discourse and of their techniques of knoweldge. Rather than being immutable and eternal, logic is a progressive, self-improving discipline, as are the human techniques of knowledge from which it is derived. Though empirical in origin, the principles of logic are nevertheless authoritative, since they enable us to distinguish successful knowledge from false; but we can put our trust in them for the identical reason that we trust an automobile or a pill: we may trust logic more than medicine, but we trust it for the same reason, because its principles have been laboriously discovered to be instruments by means of which we can satisfactorily achieve successful knowledge. They are the abstract rules of a winning game. There is no need therefore to assume that they express ultimate and invariant properties of the universe.

It follows that the time honored distinction between "formal logic" and "scientific method" is a distinction without a difference. Indeed formal logic was the scientific method of Aristotle's day, derived by Aristotle from the scientific practice of his day. It is incom-

*_Logic_. The Theory of Inquiry. Henry Holt and Company. $4.00

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plete and inadequate, because the scientific needs of his day did not go beyond classification and demonstration of already discovered truth—a truth initially arrived at by haphazard empirical methods. The Greeks did not need their theory to control the world—they controlled their slaves, who in turn took care of their mechanical and menial tasks. But since their day many additions have been made to logic particularly in the sphere of inductive inference. And yet in spite of all these additions we stubbornly retain the illusion that Aristotle formulated once for all the principles of thinking. Dewey, however, is not primarily concerned in his *Logic* with improving on Aristotle's formulations or adding to them. That has been done again and again and will be done again in the future, and in so far as he does it in this book it is done only incidentally. Dewey's treatise is primarily a *philosophy* of logic.

This is, I take it, the essence of the "instrumentalist" theory of knowledge and truth. It would not have outraged traditional philosophers as deeply as it has, had its import been properly grasped. Of course the fault is not altogether theirs; for in those books like *Experience and Nature* in which Dewey has pushed back the frontiers of thought, he has not been the easiest and most lucid of writers. But there was certainly no excuse to take him to mean that we have a right to accept as true whatever we damn please, since truth is after all merely a means to our personal satisfaction. Whatever William James may have meant by his pragmatic theory of truth, Dewey has never meant anything of the kind. He has frequently pointed out that while knowledge is instrumental, the subjective motive for its pursuit need not be utilitarian but may be, and indeed often is, an end in itself for the inquirer. Knowledge is instrumental in the sense that it is addressed to the resolution of the problem which gave rise to the inquiry; therefore the value of the solution—its truth—can not be determined independently of it. In Dewey's own words, instrumentalism is "a theory not about personal disposition and satisfaction in knowing, but about the proper objects of science."

This analysis of knowledge bears directly on the so-called epistemological problem, which is admittedly the basic problem of modern philosophy, but which philosophy is no nearer resolving satisfactorily in our day than it was in Descartes'. The problem emerges when the conception of knowledge which modern philosophy inherited from the Greeks is used to interpret the results of modern science. Since science is believed to discover the "real," the physicist has a right to assert that the world is really atoms or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

charges of energy. Consequently a break is made between common sense and knowledge; and what is worse, the world is stripped of the qualities and values which we find in it, and for the sake of which we live. But introspective psychology, which is also a science, reveals the world to be made up of ideas, sensations, impressions, or in current lingo, sensa. We have therefore two diametrically opposed and incompatible versions of "reality." The so-called problem of epistemology is the problem of reconciling physics and psychology. Tender minded souls try to reduce physics to psychology; for if reality is spiritual they can look forward to the day when, bodiless, they shall undulate in a heavenly medium wafted by angelic airs. On the other hand, tough-minded men accept the physicist's picture, and attempt to show that mind can be reduced to physical energy. If a world of whirling electrons offers no eternal rewards neither does it pollulate with spectral shadows throughout eternity. If life has no cosmic meaning, death cannot be a great evil, since it is a respite from the choking bitterness of human anguish and the blinding indignity of living.

The two solutions are silly since they rest on the erroneous assumption that it is the aim of thought to grasp the real essence of things. This is a philosophical interpretation of the function of knowledge roughly true of Greek science, but inapplicable to modern science. We cannot say the world is idea or matter because we do not seek to know what the world is but how it behaves. It is simply twaddle to make the assertion that the world is one thing or another. The epistemological problem is a factitious problem and can only be resolved by surrendering the premise from which it arises—the belief that the aim of knowledge is to grasp the essence of reality.

3

If in the light of the above analysis we examine the pictures of the world which Western culture has entertained from the beginnings of recorded speculation, several things become clear which otherwise remain shrouded in utter darkness. One of these has already been suggested in passing; and that is how superficial are the disagreements between traditional philosophers as compared with the quarrel between them and Dewey. For all their theories, based on the same conception of knowledge, are at one in the belief that knowledge reveals a type of "reality" which eludes common sense. Another point that comes to light is how organically dependent on the dualism of appearance and reality are the conceptions of human destiny which have shaped the course of Western culture.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Transcendental religions, compounded of fancy and fable ground in the mortar of frustration, nevertheless borrow from science legitimate sanction for their belief in a static reality which it is the best part of wisdom to cleave to, while "humanistic" or "naturalistic" conceptions of human destiny face the paradox of counselling men, in the name of science, to make themselves at home in a world of value and of color which the traditional interpretation of science declares to be fictitious.

When we have done away with the dualism of appearance and reality which infects Western thinking, we are in a position to provide ourselves with a satisfactory description of the world free from the errors to which the traditional theory of knowledge commits us. This has been attempted by Dewey in *Experience and Nature,* in which he seeks to discover "the generic traits" of existence by means of the empirical method. But note that the word "empirical" is not used by Dewey in the same sense in which it has been used by British philosophers. Dewey uses it as it is used by contemporary scientists.

Empirical observation of the world gives us a philosophy which Dewey calls "empirical naturalism". It discovers the world to be made up of processes or events, having histories, and involving natural beginnings and ends. Observation reveals also that these events exhibit both traits of contingency and stability, hazard and regularity. But philosophy has always undertaken the task of explaining away as illusory the untoward traits and of demonstrating the exclusive or superior reality of the dependable ones. Thus it has always been a superior type of magic, whose chief function has been to help us adapt ourselves imaginatively to the universe instead of helping us to change it; in so doing, it has pushed "the genuine moral problem of mitigating the troublesome factors" into the background and has disparaged and neglected it as "merely practical."

Since the function of knowledge is not to discover an underlying reality, neither "matter" nor "mind" (or "spirit") can be thought to be a *substance* or hidden cause of events. "Matter is a word which points to a character of events when they occur at a certain level of interaction," it is the "character of regular and stable order" in the change of natural events. And "mind" denotes the fact that with the aid of language—which develops from the interaction of animals endowed with specific physiological equipment—things and events are referred to by us, the order and the connection of their appearance can be discriminated, and their consequences can be anticipated and communicated to our fellows. For

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a naturalistic empiricism the insoluble problem which haunts both materialism and idealism does not exist. "Matter" is what the scientist tells us it is in terms of behavior, for science is not concerned with investigating the nature of substance. And "mind" is a word that points to a different type of natural events, not to a different kind of substance. There is no reason why we should not seek to understand mental events as we do any other natural event, by discovering what are the conditions of their appearance and continuance, and what are the modes of their behavior. Natural events at a certain level of organization are designated as "inorganic." At another level they become "organic." And at still another level of organization, concomitantly with the development of language, "mind" appears. The distinction between the physical, the psycho-physical and the mental "is thus one of levels of increasing complexity." But the important thing for philosophy is not to offer a finished theory of life and mind; these are tasks for biology and psychology. Its task is to establish the methodological point: to show that the so-called problems of "life" and "mind" are not "metaphysical" problems; that there is no need to assume different kinds of stuffs or different kinds of energies to explain the emergence of life and mind; that these are problems therefore that can be solved by the same methods of investigation that are used successfully in investigating other natural phenomena. Neither the problems of "life" nor of "mind" have yet been solved completely; nor is this peculiar to them as scientific problems. But we do know enough about them to dispel the mystery which makes of these phenomena dark Gothic dungeons haunted by the phosphorescent spooks of medieval obscurantism.

4

Throughout the preceding sections use was implicitly made of a principle which is ubiquitous and radical in Dewey's thought. Knowledge, it was intimated, arises from "the interaction" between organism and environment. The Darwinian origin of the principle of interaction will not escape the reader; but he should also note how much more fluid and deeper Dewey made it, and how he extended its use to explain all aspects of experience. Nor must we take it "mechanically"; the principle must be understood in so complete and literal a sense that we must not suppose that the organism and the environment "are 'given' as independent things, and interaction is a third independent thing which finally intervenes." Dewey is able to rear on this deepened and extended concep-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion of interaction his moral and aesthetic theory as well as his theory of knowledge and truth. It follows that the subjective aspect of experience has an objective correlative, and the objective, in so far as it affects man, has also its subjective terminal. This disposes of arguments in favor of the unqualified subjectivity of experience. And it also disposes of the traditional conception of the self or soul, which views them as an essentially self-complete or monadic affair. And this is in turn of the utmost importance for ethical and social theory.

Dewey's conception of the self is developed in full in *Human Nature and Conduct*. Man's nature is shown to be a function of his biological equipment, defined chiefly by habit and desire, in interaction with a physical and social environment. Since habits and desires are functions of two variables, they are plastic within limits. Intelligence has the task of discovering the direction of desirable change and the means of bringing it about. The picture that results is quite unlike the conception of human nature inherited from Plato by way of Paul and Augustine. The latter is an autocratic conception—a reflection in psychology of the totalitarian political ideals of an embittered hater of democracy. Emphasizing the complexities of impulse and desire which make up human personality, Dewey's theory points to the fact that its adequate development consists of an optimum of harmonious fulfillment, rather than the thwarting of a "lower animal nature" by a "higher faculty" which is inimical to its needs and cravings.

In the light of such a conception of personality the moral problem becomes the problem of altering the individual and the environment to realize concrete desiderata. What is desirable, as distinguished from the merely desired, is defined by intelligence in terms of the long range needs of the social animal, the plasticity of his nature, the availability of resources at hand, and the resistance offered by the environment. And since individual and environment are, except for pathological cases, in intimate interrelation, the needs of the one are never utterly out of relation with the resources of the other.

In terms of Dewey's redefinition of the moral problem some of the fundamental theoretical problems of classical morality remain. We still have to define "the good" and "the right"; and we still must give meaning to such terms as "freedom" and "responsibility." We still have to define the objective and relatively stable criteria of conduct for any given place and time, for otherwise life is at the mercy of arrogant power in the hands of whimsical wills. But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dewey lifts the problems of ethics out of their classical context and defines them in empirical terms. The parochial prejudices which it is so frequently the end of ethical theory to justify are stripped from it, and the emotive tone of unctuous and unexamined piety which so frequently suffuses moral discussion finds no capillaries through which to flow. Ethics becomes scientific and verifiable, and bluntly pertinent to human aspirations.

Although the human animal is plastic within more or less determinate limits, the problem of moral control includes the need for changes in the environment as well as in himself. That a transformation of the social environment is possible and necessary an evolutionist like Dewey can not doubt. It is only a question of the direction of that change and the pertinent means thereto. The end, Dewey thinks, should be socialism. This entails, of course, "thorough-going changes in the set up of institutions and corresponding activities to bring those changes about." But when we look for concrete directions as to how to achieve that end we do not find them in his political writings. But since in this paper no space can be spared to show the limitations and difficulties of Dewey's thought, it should be enough here to remark that Dewey's discussion of liberalism and socialism, and his faith in the power of education to bring the desired changes about, are the impassioned expression of a man of supremely good intentions. Let us accept his political writing as an expression of his faith, and concede that it is not as a political thinker that Dewey will be remembered. The daring and originality of his thought manifest themselves in the field of technical philosophy. Because Dewey is a philosopher his contributions are at one remove from immediate practical actuality. There are good reasons to expect that ultimately his thought will affect the practice of men profoundly. But its effect will be indirect and slow.

5

Although Dewey's contribution to the philosophy of education represents his most influential sphere of activity, if measured quantitatively, it will not be mentioned here for reasons of space. His philosophy of religion must also be ignored, although it marks a significant step in the development of a purely ethical and essentially naturalistic conception of religion. But reference must be made to his aesthetic theory, for it constitutes a very important contribution. Indeed I believe that in the history of American aesthetics Dewey ranks as the outstanding figure; and this is said in full recog-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nition of the importance of the contributions of men like Santayana and Prall.

Dewey defines the aesthetic experience as a complete and full experience in its rounded and integrated totality. The aesthetic is not different from any other kind of experience; we find in it only those traits which belong to every normal experience. The difference lies in the degree of clarification and intensification achieved by the components of the former and not of the latter. Complete experiences have their own unique emotional tone and carry with them "an individualizing quality"; throughout them "there runs a sense of growing meaning conserved and accumulating towards an end that is felt as accomplishment of a process." Because the aesthetic experience is a complete experience, all that does not contribute to mutual organization is eliminated from it, and only those aspects of things or events that are consonant with one another are selected. That is to say that it has unity, that it is *an* experience. And to the degree to which it is an experience it involves heightening of vitality. At its height, it also involves complete interpenetration of the self and the world of objects and events. The aesthetic object therefore is not the physical thing on the pedestal or on the wall in an empty gallery. The object hanging on the wall is the stimulus necessary to produce the vivid and unified aesthetic object which emerges in the aesthetic experience; it is the product of an interaction between the consumer, who brings to bear on the experience the totality of his available resources, and those energies and forces which the artist ordered and expressed through the physical material.

Like the rest of Dewey's theory, his theory of art is profoundly naturalistic. What is expressed by the artist and perceived by the consumer are values and meanings, but these are inextricably bound to the matter which expresses them; indeed it would be more exact to say that the values and meanings expressed are the material itself when it is organized in a certain manner in the aesthetic experience. "Ethereal things" are things of sense. "There is no limit to the capacity of immediate sensuous experience to absorb into itself meanings and values that in and of themselves—that is, in the abstract—would be designated 'ideal' or 'spiritual'."

By means of these fundamental conceptions Dewey is able to clarify the notions of form and content, and show how they are logical distinctions possessing only a mutually relative status, so that they can change places with one another depending on the shifting interests of the spectator. He is thus able to show how freshness of material entails necessarily newness of form and vice

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

versa, and hence how originality of expression, contributed both by artist and consumer, is necessary for a truly complete and vivid experience. But what is perhaps most important of all for a complete theory of art, he is able to demonstrate the place art can have in a well rounded life, and the impact it can have on ordinary activity by bringing into clear expression the meanings and ideals found vaguely diffused in the drives and aspirations of our humdrum pursuits.

6

The achievement of John Dewey is very great. One who surveys his thought with a modicum of knowledge of the history of philosophy must place him among the men who constitute its high moments. He has scope of vision and depth, acuity of analytic insight and bold originality. A quick glimpse at the table of contents of Mr. Ratner's Selections,* just published, is all that is necessary to show how wide is the range of his interests. Dewey has called forth strong criticism, and some of it is not altogether unfair, for his work is not finished like that of an architect of French gardens, but is rough, like that of a pioneer who builds lightly and hastily and pushes on when the mass of the homesteaders catch up with him. His system awaits the detailed labor of the interpreters and the finishers; but in this he is not unique in the history of philosophy. Whatever place he may come to have in history, he cannot be denied the distinction of having presented his generation with a philosophy profoundly naturalistic in temper, addressed to resolving the most urgent and most fundamental problems of his age; one based on a method which is faithful to the procedures of modern science; and one which avoids the pitfalls of obsolete mechanistic materialism while cutting the ground from under that form of mysticism known as dialectical materialism; and yet one which can serve as a theoretical foundation for practical action addressed to building a sane and humane world.

**Intelligence in the Modern World.* John Dewey's Philosophy. Edited and with an introduction by Joseph Ratner. The Modern Library. $1.25. This book is heartily recommended to anyone desirous of getting acquainted with Dewey's thought. Mr. Ratner's long essay is an admirable piece of interpretation and an invaluable introduction to that end.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Back to the City

William Carlos Williams

THE SMELL of a train and the smell of a boat are two different things.

It was still early evening when the Boston Express pulled into Troy—and hot! Whew! said Gurlie. Why it's worse than summer.

It is summer, said the baggage agent.

She wondered if she hadn't made a mistake after all, coming down at this time. What's the matter with you people down here, she said to him. Why do you have it so hot?

The man looked at her as he was putting the various pieces of luggage on the wagon to run them down to the boat alongside the tracks. Is this all? he said.

Lottie clung to her mother. Flossie was half asleep again with the heat. Here, said Gurlie putting her down beside the baggage for the moment. You watch her.

Hey! said the man. You can't put her down there. You take her off. If you want to get on board you go on down that way. Right down there. That's the passenger entrance.

How do I know you'll put my things on the boat? said Gurlie.

You got your receipt, ain't you? He looked hard at her.

There was a steady line of men with hand trucks going down the gangplank, passing close to where Gurlie stood—sweat, tobacco, rope, oil—there was a smell even of fresh hay, bale after bale of it being wheeled in hurriedly. They were under a long station shed, worn planks full of nails working up out of the wood and broken splinters.

What time does the boat leave? asked Gurlie of a passing employe in a peaked hat.

Six o'clock, ma'am. In about an hour. There it is posted above the passengers' entrance. Dinner will be served in the dining saloon after we leave. Boat leaves at 6 P.M. it said in chalk on a small blackboard suspended by a string from one of the roof supports.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I think this is the same boat we came up on, said Gurlie to the colored stewardess. Yes'm. I remember you. You had your sister with you that time, a big woman. Shall I help you with the bags, ma'am? The children looked at her. Lottie smiled. You better get yourself a stateroom, ma'am, if you haven't done so already. She spoke beautifully with a soft, velvety voice that inspired instant confidence.

At last the two were undressed and in their bunks, smelling so oddly, half fresh, half stale—and so close to the wall! with a high edge so you couldn't fall out. They could hear shouts outside, Let 'er go! then the fall of a heavy something into the water. The engines started to throb just before dark and they were really off back to the city.

The city, the city, the city, the city, the city, said the engines gradually gaining speed. Gurlie soon began to find out that returning down a river was nothing like going away up it, already a kind of fever to her. Never again, not with children. She would never go to that trouble again. Not she. Put them on the boat and let somebody else meet them.

Away to the west over the suburbs of Albany there was a flaming sunset, mountains of golden cloud riding over turquoise bays with level rifts of lesser clouds between, reds and pinks and greys. Gurlie watched from her stateroom window while the children chirped and looked from the upper berth where Lottie wanted to be placed along with her sister—for company. Go to sleep. I'll sit outside the window, right there, where you can see me.

At least it was a little cooler now though a following wind between the low banks as they dropped below the city prevented any strong breeze from the boat's motion. A man shouted some sort of greeting from shore. You could hear his voice distinctly—though Gurlie couldn't quite make out what he said—if it was anything intelligible. What a small stream it is up here.

Birds, weeds, flotsam—That couldn't be a man—No, just a dog—it must be—floating.

I'll watch the children, ma'am. You go on up on the deck awhile. I'll take care of them.

Now don't you expect me to give you a big tip, said Gurlie. Because I won't. I'll give you a quarter if you help me but I'm not going to give you a tip like these rich people around here.

Yes Ma'am. I'll take care of the children. You go on and get yourself a rest.

Inside the saloon you could feel the woodwork shake with a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

low thundering sound, a rhythmic shudder. Several older children were drawing water from the cooler. They were spilling it. Gurlie saw herself in the large mirror where the stairs turned to go up from either side. Her face was flushed. Stepping over the high sill of the door she went onto the upper deck.

Downstream now. The air was hot and still. Out here the boat seemed to glide as if immobile, the banks receding silently. That was the country—rushing off. The city, the city, the city—it went on—on in her mind. The old thoughts rushing to greet her, already changing from what she had known all summer long.

She watched the darkening river bank with long patches of pickerel weed out through shallow water in the mud. There was a boy fishing from a boat. She watched as the swell of the river steamer caught him aslant rocking his small craft violently for a moment, then passing. Some men were swimming in front of a stranded scow tilted inshore. There was a piece of ladder nailed to its side in one place so that a person could climb from the water to dive from it. One of them was waiting now for the swell to reach him before he plunged off. A straggling flock of crows was passing lazily overhead across the river.

The country is quiet and peaceful. The city will be hot and uncomfortable. The city, the city, the city—it made her restless, uneasy. I wonder if Joe got my letter. He'd better be there.

Gurlie half dozed, finally slept and awoke later chilly and alone. She did not realize how long she had been there. She felt cramped. The banks were higher here, the steamer was turning in to the shore. It was dark too—drifting without a sound of the engines. It must have been the bell that woke her, or the change in the ship's motion.

Brugh! she decided to go down and get to bed. Country still. At night the country is like a wilderness.

She must have slept longer than she realized. The saloon was deserted except for one or two as usual with no cash for a stateroom sitting dozing. She unlocked the door, the children were asleep together. She undressed. Tomorrow—the engines had not started. There was not a sound of any sort but a man snoring somewhere. The boat was drifting again. Then—she heard a giggle, almost at her ear. She had not put the light out—having drawn the curtains in front of the children's bunk deciding to read a little while.

There were whispers next door and a smothered laugh. Gurlie looked at the wood of the partition which was painted white. In the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

intense gliding silence she could hear distinctly, Bless you, darling! and a soft, continuous rustling noise that caused her to stiffen, intently alert—a tittering laugh and then after a moment heavy breathing. It was the last she heard. For the bell rang three times, rapidly and the heavy shudder of the boat as the wheels were reversed approaching the landing drowned everything else out.

At the wharf she could hear the dull, regular thud of merchandise being dumped on deck—just a few pieces, then the subdued shouts, the poundings of the cable and the engines starting again —somewhere, outside, in another world. It was deathly hot in the cabin while they were inshore. She'd be glad when they were out in the river again. Must be near eleven o'clock. She was too indifferent to look.

She had glanced at the boat's "library" on her way down to her cabin thinking to find something there she might read, knowing she couldn't sleep, but it was closed—behind the sliding glass door along the wall of the saloon and locked tight. Lying at the dock the noises next door had ceased. Gurlie picked up an illustrated book of children's verses belonging to the children. She held it in her hands staring at it—tried to read it but relapsed—after a moment, with the light lit—into staring and listening.

She thought she'd like a boy—but not yet—not till Joe had more money. Europe first. Go back and show them—she'd see to that.

They were out in the stream again under the steady drive of the engine and the vibration of the paddle wheels—staring and listening—vague sounds had begun again next door—unable to make out more than occasional unrelated syllables — and Lottie breathing heavily above her—once she seemed to whimper, as a pup will do in his sleep, and say a few mumbled words. Gurlie knew there was talking next door but the steady, continuous jarring of the hull was just enough to make words unintelligible. She felt feverish—unable to close her eyes. The noises next door were stilled —at last.

She awakened again later—the boat making steady downstream in the dark, nearer and nearer — the light still burning brightly, the book of children's stories still by her left hand. The noises had begun again in the next cabin—a dull blow against the woodwork of the partition and the noise of mattress springs—as if a heavy person were turning over. The city, the city. The nervous drive of it made her angry in her thoughts.

Gurlie put out her light, put her head down in her pillow. She'd

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like to get her eyes on that woman in the morning. She'd make it her business to do so, the dirty thing. What kind of people—on a boat! practically in public.

This time she did not awake until she could see, in an early morning light, the grey pillars of the palisades. The children were calling her. Almost in. The children were whispering—or Lottie was—and trying to look out between the narrow slats of the shuttered windows. There were a few people walking by on the narrow deck and occasional snatches of conversation. She heard water running into the basin next door and the splash of someone washing. She didn't like it.

Mommie, I want to get up. Little Flossie took up the refrain, Mommie, Mommie, Mommie, Mommie, Mommie. Gurlie was afraid they would fall out so she took the baby in with her and let Lottie kneel on the plush couch and peek out as best she could. Dress yourself, said Gurlie to her, if you want to go out.

I want to go! Gurlie rang for the stewardess and made her take care of the children, then she put on her own clothes—and opened the window. Thank goodness. What a beautiful day.

Give them each a glass of milk. Anything for you, Madam? No, said Gurlie. Just let me off this boat. That's all I want. You don't know how to make people comfortable in this country. Dreadful.

I'm very sorry, madam.

What a night! She hadn't slept a wink—so to speak—thanks to those people in the next cabin. She sat down on one of the chairs in the saloon on purpose to see them come out which they did after a time, together. Just a child! Gurlie was shocked. A little thin faced boney legged thing—probably the mother of the race—but very cocky, holding her head high and with a shy, thickset, strong looking man—freshly shaved, following her. Entirely disproportionate.

Pugh! said Gurlie puffing out her lips in disdain and forgot about them at once. Now they were coming into the dock at 23rd St. She rushed back into the cabin to see if she had forgotten anything. Opening the drawer of the wash-stand, on the chance that she might have left something in there, she saw a black book and picked it up. It was the Bible. Why didn't I have that last night? She turned instinctively to her favorite Revelations.

Too late now.

Telegram. Gurlie opened the yellow envelope nervously. Joe couldn't be there. He was in Washington. Just like him. He knew

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

we were coming home today. Now just what can that mean?

It was frightening to be in New York again on the noisy dock among the luggage—especially with the two children. Gurlie was irritated and bewildered without Joe by the slowness and indifference of the baggage handlers so that it was more than a simple delight to see dear Auntie coming smiling among the crowd to them.

Lottie ran to her at once.

You poor things, said she. You look hot and tired. How brown you have become, Lottie sweetheart. And how's little Spider? Let me see her. Um, she's still the same—Well, have you got your baggage out? Did you rest on the boat?

Rest! I didn't sleep a wink. I didn't even want to touch anything. I wouldn't wash in those basins, said Gurlie. I don't know who was there before me.

Auntie took the stubs and soon had everything or almost everything efficiently managed so that they could take their small hand luggage, hail a cab and go bumping over the stones back to the apartment. But the trunk?

Was it hot on the boat?

Yes, it was hot and dirty and—impossible. I wish I could tell you — but I'm ashamed. You don't know anything about such things. We weren't brought up that way. I think those boats are no better than floating whore houses. Terrible people. I couldn't sleep a wink.

What! said the big woman in amazement.

You should have seen the fresh face on her. On whom? said Olga. The woman. What woman? The woman I am telling you about, she slept next to me all night long.

Next to you?

In the next cabin. And that man. I don't believe it was her husband. I'll bet the company hires them for that — to get passengers. You can't tell me different. Do we have to stand in this line? The law should put a stop to it. All night, all night. I don't know how they didn't get tired.

Maybe they were on their honeymoon.

Nonsense! you don't know anything. You're just an old maid. Decent people don't act that way. Just a harlot. I'm going to tell Joe to write a letter to the company protesting—or to the Police, subjecting decent women and children to filth of that kind. You can't tell what they were doing in there. And there was a Bible in the room—

Oh, I don't think it's so bad as that.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You don't! Well I am more experienced than you and I know better. How can you safely take children on a boat like that. Society should protest—or put the boats out of business. What have you been doing all summer? And what is Joe up to?

He didn't tell me anything except that you would be here on the boat today.

At the high desk on the dock Gurlie couldn't find the check for the trunk. I gave it to you.

No madam.

Just now. I handed it to you with my own hands.

You gave me the slip for the small baggage but not for the trunk.

They were both the same. I mean they were together.

I beg your pardon ma'am, they were not.

What are you trying to tell me. I tell you they were. Don't you talk back to me like that. What are you trying to do? I tell you I gave them both to you. Gurlie was furious.

The man said nothing.

I'll bring a complaint against you. If my husband were here you wouldn't talk to me like that. There were several people waiting by this time. I'm sorry madam, you will have to move on. Gurlie didn't move. Not till I get my things. There it is right there. with my name on it. I'm going to take it with me. Give me a piece of paper, I'll write my name and address on it—

I'm sorry madam, I'll have to call an officer. You are holding us all up here.

Call him. I'll have you arrested. I gave you the two slips, both together. Are you trying to steal them for the company. Such dirty boats. I won't leave here till I get my trunk. No, I won't! she turned to the others near her.

I don't blame you, said a shabby looking man.

I'm sorry madam but you gave me only one stub.

I gave you two. Oh come on, Gurlie, said Olga under her breath, we can straighten that out later. I'll go to the office.

I will not.

Next, said the man. There it is, said Gurlie taking up several papers on the desk. The man came out from behind it in alarm and attempted to take them away from her. No, said Gurlie. Yes, said the man. No, said Gurlie, this is mine. The man looked at it. He went over to the trunk and compared the numbers.

No ma'am.

You're a lot of thieves, said Gurlie.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You'll have to take that up with the office. Next, said the man. Look in your handbag, said Olga. Come on. But I want to take it in the cab with us now. No, I won't go. Come on. They want to keep it here then charge us extra. I'm sure I gave him the ticket. Or else it's lost, I don't know.

A very pleasant older man at the office said he would take care of it—and he did.

Gurlie produced her key and in a very short time the trunk in the cab they were on their way up town.

How are they all in Vermont?

I feel dizzy. It's so hot here. I wish I hadn't come home to be left alone that way with those stupid men.

Wasn't I there to help you? said her sister.

I don't want to talk about it.

The poor kids were completely ignored — but they had the windows to look out of. As the cab stopped at a crossing a boy of twelve or so stared in at Lottie, not a foot away, and made a face. She drew back but the baby unabashed stared at him in return wide-eyed.

The cab jerked and started. You should have heard them, Gurlie broke out, referring to the pair in the next cabin. Then changed to, What is he doing in Washington?

I don't know. I suppose it has something to do with his business.

It's about time I got home. What does he think. I'm his wife. He never tells me anything.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Paris Letter

The last Paris Letter's gloomy prognosis of the season has proved only too correct. Indeed, it is so bad that Parisians pretty much accept Virgil Thomson's melancholy crack that "this is just a winter dropped out of everybody's life; and the sooner we forget it, the better."

Artistic Paris, like the rest of France, is oppressed as by the lowering atmospheric depression before a crashing thunderstorm. The literary left roughly reflects, though with characteristic professional deformations, the discouragement and disarray of the French workers and peasants. For if there is, relatively, social peace, it is the peace of despair. Not even yet has the French working class recovered from the smashing defeat of the November 30 general strike. Even that weak and half-hearted effort brought out such disproportionately colossal repressive forces and produced such savage reprisals that the too often betrayed French workers, having as it were crawled into their holes to lick their wounds, cannot yet regain either their courage or their faith. Never have the Second and Third Internationals fallen to such depths of discredit: the time would seem famously ripe for reässembling the still basically militant workers around the original revolutionary Marxist program, the desertion of which for Popular Frontism has led to defeat in France, in Spain to catastrophe. Yet the result is, for the time being, the opposite. The blows have been too hard. For the moment, their effect has been to turn the French proletariat, not to revolution, but to inactivity and despair and the almost cynical *jemenfoutisme* of the feeling that "if you don't lift your head nobody will club it."

Grim though this sounds, the situation is far from hopeless. It is retreat, not capitulation: could the French worker see clearly and convincingly *how* to reform ranks for the fight, there is plenty of fight in him. On the (Fourth Internationalist) P.O.I. and the (Centrist) P.S.O.P. rests the historical responsibility of showing him—a responsibility on which it were no exaggeration to say that the fate, not only of France, but of all European civilization, at present depends. The French working class, which probably has the highest level of political comprehension of any national proletariat, seems merely to have retired temporarily from militant activity. Defeat has not, by and large, driven the French proletariat either to a suicidal renewal of belief in social reformism, or to crank cure-alls, or to a hysterical self-abandonment to the demagogy of fascism; quite the contrary. Would that the same could be said of the intellectuals who reflect it!

Such politically the season has been, and its deformed reflection has shown itself in the arts. It seems now time, as it draws toward

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

its close, to examine some of its literary productions. For the purpose your correspondent, rather than following his perhaps limited or biased personal proclivities, attempted, by a frank pestering of his acquaintance, followed by a statistical winnowing of the answers, to discover what, apart from poetry, was being most read and discussed. The results of such a method are naturally odd: an uneven lot of six books, two of fiction, four of what one might horrendously but fairly term "politico-philosophico-literary" works. A purely personal report on which he herewith respectfully submits.

With *Le Mur*[1], second book by Jean-Paul Sartre, the new white-haired boy of French fiction, it is easy to be pleased, hard to be excited. Its five stories, of varying but considerable length, are workmanlike, realist, and interesting. The impact of political events shows in the subject of the title story (a largely psychological reportage of the thoughts of a miliciano condemned to execution by Franco fascists) and of *L'Enfance d'un Chef* (a long careful biographico-fictional account of how fascist leaders get that way). The remaining three stories are individual psychological studies. All the stories are to be praised for the fact that Sartre (who is neither lazy nor amorphous as an artist) eschews the facility of the mere slice-of-life technique, and presents them as fully formed, conclusively constructed dramas. Were it not for the American reading public's incomprehensible prejudice against volumes of collected stories, these should prove a natural for publication in translation by an enterprising American publisher.

Yet, withal their excellent qualities, they somehow disappoint. Certainly—to take an American comparison—they are far superior to those of, say Hemingway. But they have the faults of their qualities—a cautiousness, a sense of prose tradition, a tendency to choose the surefire effect—that render them, despite their youthful richness, a little literary, a little thin. Sartre, a very young writer, may well go on to greater self-confidence in and self-abandonment to his own art; yet he may equally well, especially under the indirect temptation of present success, degenerate into a mere homme-de-lettres.

Les Enfants du Limon[2] is a horse of a quite different kettle of feathers. A long fantastic satirical novel, splashed with poetry and a weird exhaustively cited scholarship on the subject of nineteenth-century French literary madmen, it is, if in any French literary tradition, in that of the encyclopædic Rabelais. Illuminating comparison with known works in English it practically defies. For its tone varies from the profound and brilliant satire of a Ronald Firbank down to the simple artful gayety and wittiness of an Evelyn Waugh. Perhaps, stylistic differences duly discounted, its net effect most resembles that of the less pædagogical sections of Wyndham

1 JEAN-PAUL SARTRE: *Le Mur*. Pp. 220, Gallimard (nrf), fr. 20.
2 RAYMOND QUENEAU: *Les Enfants du Limon*. Pp. 316, Gallimard (nrf), fr. 22.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lewis' *Apes of God,* in that the preposterous and blown-up figures who stalk its pages seem sometimes more vividly real than reality.

It is "about" practically everything under the sun, but most particularly concerns the financial, intellectual, and human collapse of a millionaire family, the descendants and relatives of radio-king Jules-Jules Limon. Its characters range from an Antoniolatrous anti-fascist fruit-merchant to a professorial uncle who in his scholarly study of literary madmen comes within a millimetre of losing his own mind, through a gamut including a conceivably genuine devil complete with sulphurous breath, a communist-minded elder daughter who starts a fascist party under a total and ultimately fatal misapprehension, and a chic style-setting brother who ends as a junk-dealer. It is more full of gusto and mischief than a treeful of monkeys, and its style is a perpetual acrobatic. If it is definable, apart from the cauterizing effect of its destructive satire, as the literature of escapism, it frankly pretends to nothing else. It proves nothing, teaches nothing, but is it diverting!

With the non-fictional group, we enter a more solemn, and, alas, a more earnest and depressing, field. With one exception, these four books, under the more or less explicit pretext that Marxism isn't the whole story (which genuine Marxism has certainly never pretended to be), attempt, not a synthesis between basic Marxist theory and whatever their technical specialty happens to be, but an escape from Marxism, either, on the one hand, by a flat denial of its validity, or, on the other, by sundry "revisions" and "modernizations" of its basic concepts—both often seen before in times of retreat. This escapism, indeed, is itself a phenomenon which only Marxism itself can consistently explain. Need it be insisted on that what the time most urgently demands is synthesis of still inadequately related knowledge? Among the exact sciences alone the need is striking enough; add to that the still unintegrated discoveries in anthropology, in psychology of all schools, in semantics and general epistemology, in Marxist development itself—to name only a chance few. Yet, in only one of these books is there any serious attempt to establish these relations, to make this fusion.

Most summarily disposed of is *La Psychanalyse du Feu*[3], though Bachelard, who apparently fancies himself as a rebel, often distinguishes himself carefully in this book from "classic psychoanalysis", the real distinction is that he has introduced psychoanalysis into belles-lettres. This fancy little volume strikes one as the Izaak Walton's *Compleat Angler* of psychiatry, and, if translated, should most correctly be published with prodigious margins on hand-chewed paper by some Nonesuch Press for the delectation of psychoanalytic bibliophiles. Limiting philosophy to the rôle of reconciling poetry and science, this pretentious literary gent has never-

3 GASTON BACHELARD: *La Psychanalyse du Feu.* Pp. 219, Gallimard (nrf), fr. 22

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

theless written a book of philosophy (using the word in the sense in which most of the practitioners of the exact sciences do, i.e. as a term of abuse) in a coquet little style which bursts constantly into poesy of the ickiest description. Sandwiched in among such definitions as "Fire is a privileged phenomenon which can explain everything. . . . It shines in Paradise. It burns in Hell. It is sweetness and torture. It is cooking and apocalypse" we find such earnest dicta as "One can study only what one has first dreamed." This escapist volume is significant, quite apart from Bachelard's personal farciness, as an example of the way that, under political stress, psychoanalysis tends to become a pseudo-antithesis to both Marxism and the exact sciences.

A better but still sadder book, because by a man of great artistic power, is Giono's *Poids du Ciel*[4]. This volume, printed by highly advanced industrial processes, illustrated with Lumière Opta and Super S. E. astrophotographic plates made through a complex 81-centimetre telescope, is largely an attack on industrial processes and a passionate advertisement for individual peasant farming, Arcadian sheepherding, handicraft weaving, and the necessity of leaving Jean Giono alone so that he may "live! live!" in "grandeur and nobility." Repeatedly infuriated by the fact that the rails of tramcars are "fixed"(!), and that people driving automobiles have a tendency to look where they are going, Giono, in his hysterical desire to preserve individuality, cannot believe that we are *all* trying to save individuality, but that some of us doubt the best means thereto to consist in gazing at tall mountains and distant constellations in a rapt daze, or attempting to return to an agricultural economy plus philosophic anarchism and pastoral psychology which has certainly never existed outside the Eclogues of the most refined classical poets. Smitten with the realization that man is infinitesimally small in comparison with the universe, Giono's conclusion seems to be that man should therefore abandon all clarity of thought, all further effort to improve his lot in nature, and drift on to nothingness in an ecstatic fog. Or rather, not to nothingness, for, as Giono will soon find, the world will *not* leave him alone: suicidal imperialist wars, fascism, and the ultimate destruction of European civilization would, one fears, find Giono still bleating for everyone please to be nice and not to "belong to" things. This comic view is, oddly enough, the kindly one. Sterner folk might with justification point out that Giono's hatred of industrialism, which already in the present book shows a hemi-metamorphosis into a hatred of the industrial worker, suggests that, if he is too humanly decent and bright in the head to be a pushover for the fascist demagogy about peasant holdings, return to the soil, and the spirit of the race, he might yet prove a bewildered but murderous Makhno[5]. One can

4 JEAN GIONO: *Les Poids du Ciel*. Illustrated with 32 astrophotographs by M. de Kerolyr. Pp. 243. Gallimard (nrf), fr. 75.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have humanly nothing but sympathy for Giono's hatred of French rationalism and industrial capitalism; but his resultant attack on them from the positions of poesy and agrarianism proves but a sad step backward. This deluxe volume for the masses (peasant or otherwise), which, despite its boyscout muddledness, retains in parts Giono's indisputable poetic ability (there is an early descriptive outburst on the robots of a fascist army which is of an amazing brilliance), shows him essentially a pathetic—and characteristic—modern instance.

Mabille[6] impresses one at first by posing himself a respectable task: the systematization of knowledge. Stating that his purpose is not to collect knowledge, as did the encyclopedists, but to suggest the schemata by which knowledge may be assembled, he chooses as key: morphology. An égrégore (the term is revived from the Hermetics) he defines as "the human group endowed with a personality different from that of the individuals who compose it". This he sets up as a more fruitful concept than the Marxian concept of the determining nature of the means of production, redefining égrégores as collectivities which are "a coherent system which hierarchizes all human values." Noting that parent collectivities die long before their psychological effect has worn off their children, to collective action he opposes the determinism of contemporary events. At this point the book goes off into social astrology and a special Spenglerian Cloudcuckooland of its own, focused much on the key-year 1550. Etc.

It is depressing reading. Mabille is not only a brilliant but often a serious mind. He has had a Marxist training. He frankly anticipates an obvious accusation by flatly stating that in this time of political defeat, it is necessary to retire into contemplation, nor does he deny the psychological effect of political defeat upon himself. Yet, having seen clearly thus far, he goes off into social astrology; and ends up like a Spengler, as dangerous, if not more so, because his little volume is not only symptomatic but impressive.

In all this drearyish account the principal ray of hope gleams from the *Foyers d'Incendie*[7] of Nicolas Calas. This brilliant young Greek, of whom this is the first published volume, has posed, and gone a good way toward solving, some of the most interesting politico-artistic problems of the epoch. A conscious Surréaliste, he has first of all done a job that has long been needed: he has decently interred Surréalisme in a scholarly textbook which will permit it to be taught historically in colleges, and permit art to go on to something else. But, as a sort of Wyndham Lewis of the Left, in

5 In the September "War" Crisis, Giono is credibly reported to have mobilized the surrounding peasantry to resist mobilization to arms by arms: a characteristically muddled action, sympathetic in its instinct, dangerous in its ramifications.

6 PIERRE MABILLE: *Egregores, ou La Vie des Civilizations.* Pp. 186, Jean Flory, fr. 18. (See also his earlier book, *La Construction de l'Homme* and the study *Therese de Lisieux.*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this curiously uneven and heterogeneous work, evidently accreted gradually (indeed, one has the sneaking suspicion that it is the amplification of a doctoral thesis), he does much much more—more than a casual letter like this can even touch on. But, for examples, among a thousand other things, he examines in thought-stimulating detail the whole connection between art and revolution; he raps alternately the knuckles of both Marxism and psychoanalysis when the more religious of their practitioners try to extend them beyond the limits of their own fields; he backs up economic analysis by a revealing study of the psychology of fascism as an abandonment to a credo-quia-impossibile faith; he poses the necessity of a revolutionary synthesis of knowledge; he finds time to explode such disparate figures as Proust and Tzara and Max Eastman, and to spare a few sound smacks for the religion and politics of Whitehead, and the weaknesses of the well-meaning Herbert Read. With an amazing linguistic scholarship, he can pause in passing to do such useful jobs as that of demonstrating why the vocabulary of Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* is a dead end; he can derive interesting conclusions from subjecting the work of Picasso vs. Dali to the odd test of converting a picture of each into a sort of jig-saw puzzle; he surprisingly elevates surprise and habit to the poles of revolutionary psychological dialectic; he casually starts a sharp polemic by dropping the obviously true observation that the Freudian goal of social adaptibility is reactionary in contrast to the Surréaliste goal of revolution; and sometimes, letting himself go, coolly proposes a mechanized Louvre, or suggests for workers' children the substitution, in lieu of bourgeois lead soldiers, of lead figures of workers, barricades, and overturned omnibuses, and an opposing force of bosses, priests, and cops—even going on to suggest, with a bright grin, the substitution of chocolate guillotines for chocolate Easter-eggs.

It is only fair to note that Calas's simple unspoiled passion for sadism makes him seriously misstate the causes of Hitler's accession to state power; he believes naïvely that psychoanalysis has brought about the sexual *emancipation* of man; and, though we may accept chocolate guillotines, we beg to be excused from sharing the author's anticipated pleasure in hearing Shakespeare's sonnets sung by Tino Rossi. But, unless there is a mute inglorious Milton somewhere about, this book is indubitably the most stimulating that France has produced this year.

With which somewhat hasty and superficial report of the state of the republic of letters in the city of light, your correspondent begs leave to catch up on his two-weeks-neglected newspapers, to see whether he can postpone until at least the autumn, his hiring of a country cottage and a bomb-proof bicycle.

SEAN NIALL

---

7 NICOLAS CALAS: *Foyers d'Incendie.* Pp. 258, Editions Denoel.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Variety of Fiction

Philip Rahv

THESE SEVEN WORKS of fiction* divide themselves between Europe and America. Reading them in succession, the first thought that comes to mind is that nowadays the difference between the literature of the old world and the new amounts to the difference between manifest and latent horror. The writer in America is making what he can of his liberty to record the grimmer aspects of life; yet placed against his European counterpart, it at once becomes evident that he still inhabits a temperate human zone.

For Europe — Odon von Horvath tells us in his short fable of totalitarian society—is rapidly moving into the zone of the Fish, where the soul of man turns as rigid as the face of a fish. Horvath found a simple and inevitable image for what has happened in the Third Reich. His novel, *The Age of the Fish*, is hardly anything more than a brief, compact sermon built around this image and illustrated by a few dramatic episodes in the life of a schoolmaster and his numb little pupils. The schoolmaster intrudes upon the sphere "ruled by the radio" when one day he reproaches a boy for writing in his composition that "all niggers are dirty, cunning, and contemptible." Having touched one of the tentacles of the Moloch-state, the hapless man will never again sleep in peace. But the schoolboys hate not only the "niggers" but one another; and as one of them commits a murder for the sake of the mite of warmth the sensation provides, the teacher, now deeply compromised, takes a hand in discovering the culprit, only to be deprived of his position for his pains. And in the end that beehive of culture called Europe is caught in a final beam of irony as we sigh with relief watching the schoolmaster—nicknamed "the Nigger"—depart for Africa to teach in a missionary school. Expelled from civilization for believ-

* *The Age of the Fish*, by Odon von Horvath. Translated from the German by R. Wills Thomas. The Dial Press. $2.00; *Goodbye to Berlin*, by Christopher Isherwood. Random House. $2.50; *East of Eden*, by I. J. Singer. Translated from the Yiddish by Maurice Samuel. Knopf. $2.50; *Rope of Gold*, by Josephine Herbst. Harcourt, Brace. $2.50; *The Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck. Viking Press. $2.75; *Night Rider*, by Robert Penn Warren. Houghton Mifflin. $2.50; *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, by Katherine Anne Porter. Harcourt, Brace. $2.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing that all men are human, it is to the jungle that this refractory individual exports his obsolescent reveries.

But at bottom he is no warrior against fascism, this scurrying little man with a conscience, this searcher for tokens of divinity. Every time his ideas get twisted, a supernatural power reaches out to enlighten him. The author, one feels, is on much too familiar terms with God, whose intervention resolves the conflicts outlined in the narrative. The problem it raises is primarily one of understanding the process of dehumanization, and this shifting of the burden to God, though it may have helped Horvath to finish his story, in no way helps the reader to complete the experience he has been offered. Nor is it a question of objecting to the author's faith on ideological grounds. It really is a matter of observing how through the license of mysticism he evades the responsibilities of his medium. To drop, as he does, a concrete human situation—which at its start is presented with high integrity and a beautiful economy of means—into the lap of the infinite is to convert religion into a literary man's ruse.

Odon von Horvath was a gifted young playwright and novelist who was accidentally killed in Paris last year. His prose, quite apart from any of its specific themes, strikes an ominous note, a note that during the last few decades we have come to recognize and to expect from the troubled writers of Central Europe. It can be described as a kind of portentous buzz of the psyche. In different keys we have heard this grave sound in the work of the Expressionists, in the poems of Rilke, in the fictions of Kafka, in the pseudo-Dostoyevskyean novels of Wassermann; and people of the type of Franz Werfel repeat it on a conventional level. It is a tone of foreboding, peculiar to the air of cities like Prague, Vienna, and Berlin, on the one hand related to religion and on the other to pathology. Of course, the literature of most countries has for many years now been stirred by sinister rumors. But the Central European note has a certain timbre of its own—the modulation of a state of anxiety at once reflective and intuitive.

This note is not absent from Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin,* a collection of diaries and narratives dated from 1930 to 1933, whose theme is the neurotic condition of German life on the verge of Hitler's triumph. Mr. Isherwood, however, was no more than a visitor. His account, though it communicates the strain of the period through casually presented details of melancholy and derangement, has an undertone of humor which in a way measures its degree of detachment. One of the author's gifts is a droll mimetic talent, and his imitation of the speech of his Berlin characters, as that of Natalia in "The Landauers," comes off so well that the simple fun often dissipates the atmosphere of apprehension.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But Mr. Isherwood did not set out to write a history, and even as fiction his book makes no pretence to objective form. His prose manners are those of an impressionist. He has saved for us the flavor of the Berlin decadence during the last days of an epoch: the wealthy Jews holding in their exhaustion and giving themselves to business as usual with the suavity of bankrupts; the tough and perverted boy, Otto Nowak, who reminds one vaguely of André Gide's sweet and sour youngsters; Frl. Schroeder's boarding-house which is so skillfully sketched that it turns into a kind of social aquarium; the Communist café crowded with students "dressed mostly with aggressive political untidiness" whose mental untidiness is equally apparent at a glance; and behind every Prussian facade the flicker of hysteria and in every mouth the whisper of the fall of the city.

The Yiddish novelist, I. J. Singer, takes us into Poland and Russia. His gloomy novel, *East of Eden,* grows out of the disappointment with the results of the Russian revolution, and it may be regarded as the first literary chronicle to concern itself seriously with a subject that is bound to expand into a special genre. There is plenty of game here for ravenous realists. The actualities of the Russian situation are so fearful that even the inebriated fellow-travelers of Stalinism are fated to sober up before long. And on the morning after we can expect from them a virulent pessimism, such as Mr. Singer reveals, or else a backsliding into the cheapest bourgeois illusions.

The first part of the book tells the story of Jewish woe in the ghetto, a story told so often that it has become a standard theme, a norm, in fact, of Yiddish writing. But this version differs from others in that Mr. Singer is too tough-minded ever to yield to the poetry associated with the ghetto, the idyll of self-sufficiency evoked by those literary Romantics who see in the religious past the golden age of European Jewry. In this first part both the characterization and the painting of the environment are excellent. Mattes, the destitute, pious peddler whose one hope is to raise his son, Nachman, to a higher social station, is defeated at every turn; and when his oldest daughter is seduced by a soldier, he flees his disgrace by moving his family to Warsaw. The war comes and Mattes is drafted into the Russian army, to be killed in the first skirmish with the Austrian troops. At this point the plot, freed from the inert world of the ghetto, begins to wind itself around Nachman's experience in the revolutionary movement. Converted by the Communist leader Daniel, Nachman, now a worker, turns into a rank and file militant wholly devoted to the struggle and to his party. The stress here is on the contrast between leader and disciple. Daniel is from the very first exposed as a strutting careerist in love with his own barricade

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gestures and steaming rhetoric; Nachman, the faithful child of the masses, is his inevitable dupe. Physically broken by serving a long sentence in a Polish prison, he can no longer restrain his longing to enjoy the benefits of socialism in the land of Eden lying to the east of capitalist Poland. He makes his way into Russia and finds work in a large mechanized bakery in Moscow. — And now the scabrous facts begin looming through the doctrinal mists. Gradually, painfully, despite his almost suicidal will to believe, Nachman realizes that for people of his class nothing has really changed. Together with other half-starved, unwashed workers he lives in a crowded barrack the walls of which are adorned with lying slogans. In the factory he sees that "just as the workers hate the higher-ups, so the higher-ups hate the workers," and that this mutual hatred reproduces the class war which ostensibly has been abolished forever. Things go badly with him. Arrested for speaking up in defense of an unruly comrade, he is forced to sign the usual confession of wrecking and espionage. Any one who is puzzled as to why the old Bolsheviks "confessed" at the so-called treason trials should read this book for its close analysis of the psychology of capitulation. In Poland, where the police had nearly beaten him to death, Nachman had resisted the demand that he sign a confession naming himself as a spy, but once he is put away in the cell of a "socialist" prison ("our" prison) he is no longer the same man. For how can the revolutionary character survive the death of the revolution?

As a work of fiction *East of Eden* is far from being as successful as its predecessor, *The Brothers Ashkenazai*. Nachman and Daniel, both, are statistical types rather than characters. The second half of the story is no more than fictional reporting. Throughout, however, Mr. Singer retains his ability to represent elemental people and elemental emotions; and despite its limited perspective the book is valuable for its sober and thoughtful realism. In this connection a point might be made about the treatment this novel received at the hands of certain liberal reviewers. The prevailing hypocrisy of literary opinion is such that these reviewers—the very same individuals who for years now have been boosting political novels whose sole virtue is their Stalinist content—set out to condemn Mr. Singer for abandoning, in order to engage in politics, the "proper sphere" of the novelist. And, of course, these belated guardians of the shrine did not fail to assure their readers that it is not Mr. Singer's exposure of exploitation in Russia that annoyed them, but solely his rude tampering with the art of the novel.

Such reviewers, however, need but rarely resort to an esthetic false-face, for the political novel is still mostly the preserve of the pious. Thus in *Rope of Gold* Miss Josephine Herbst reverses the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heresies of *East of Eden*. Shutting her eyes to the Daniels, she celebrates once again the hopes and struggles, the excited optimism of the American duplicates of Mr. Singer's Nachman. But be that as it may. So long as the Nachmans are what they are, novelists like Miss Herbst should not be blamed too harshly for taking advantage of their innocence—that is, if we keep in mind that novelists too are what they are.

Rope of Gold is the third volume of a series that has been advertised as a chronicle of the American middle class in decline. But the ambitious chronicler, I am afraid, is rapidly sinking under her load of sociology. For the fact is she is no Zola, no assembler and disciplinarian of large masses of social material. Her sense of drama is weak, and being merely shrewd about people rather than good at character-creation, she is unable to project dominant and representative types—such as Babbitt or Clyde Griffith or Studs Lonigan—to embody dramatically the ideas her narrative is meant to develop. Moreover, her nervous and nostalgic style is fundamentally at odds with her objective subject-matter. And perhaps it is this contradiction which has led reviewers to describe her prose as "dull"—a criticism almost fantastically unperceptive, I think, though it is easy to see how it originated. She is among the few novelists, it seems to me, who have mastered the American idiom and developed its rhythms. Her language never sounds like the ingenious imitation of street-talk which has such a tiresome effect in so much of even the best American fiction. But the trouble is that her free, flowing, often introspective style allows for no emphasis, is ill-adapted to sustained external writing—to the conflicts, sharp turns, and climaxes her theme requires. Stretched out to take in oversize objects, it sometimes affects an impatient reader as baggy and shapeless.

Another impression is that Miss Herbst does not so much want to understand human beings and human situations as she wants simply to "know" them. Perhaps this trait can be explained by that frantic search for experience so characteristic of the writers of her generation, whose first and main reaction was against the genteel, prohibitive American past. Now travel, in the native tradition, has always recommended itself as an effective method of soliciting experience (or "Life"). Possessed by a migrant sensibility, writers assumed an air of roving reporters whose job is to "cover" as many peoples and places as possible. And political interests only encouraged and justified this floating tendency;—so that in novels like *Rope of Gold* we find the author, in her anxiety not to miss any of the eruptions of the class struggle, rushing to and fro on the planet—from Detroit to Cuba, from Cuba to South Dakota and Madrid, and back to New York and Pennsylvania.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yet, for the most part, these tours of history in the making result rather in "written up" illustrations of the class struggle than in truly felt representation and in judgments transcending the plane of popular sentiments.

Miss Herbst's new volume tells, among other things, of farm revolts, auto strikes, unemployment, and life on the intellectual periphery of the "movement." But it lacks an organic centre of consciousness unifying and evaluating the piled-up impressions. Among the numerous characters, Victoria and her husband are possibly the most conscious and intimately felt, though Victoria, whose complicated relationship to Jonathan is poorly motivated, at times is much too soulful, too submerged in good feeling to be quite real. The best parts of the novel are the long ruminative, nostalgic passages, in which personal affection and the memory of the dead and gone bring back the old American times, making the past seem close and worth doting on.

Since one expected more from Miss Herbst, a reaction of disappointment was in order. On the other hand from Mr. John Steinbeck—whose inspired pulp-story, *Of Mice and Men,* swept the nation like a plague—one expected nothing. It is therefore gratifying to report that in *The Grapes of Wrath* he appears in a more sympathetic light than in his previous work, not excluding *In Dubious Battle.* This writer, it can now be seen, is really fired with a passionate faith in the common man. He is the hierophant of the innocent and the injured; and his new book, though it by no means deserves the ecstatic salutations it has received in the press, is an authentic and formidable example of the novel of social protest.

The book is at the same time a detailed exposure of dreadful economic conditions and a long declaration of love to the masses. It is an epic of misery—a prodigious, relentless, and often excruciating account of agrarian suffering. Once introduced to the Joads, a large family of tenant farmers in Oklahoma, we don't lose sight of them through 619 pages of the most minute and literal description of their misfortunes. Living in the dustbowl area, the Joads are evicted by the banks that convert their land to large-scale cotton farming, and together with thousands of other ruined farmers they start on the long auto-trek to California. But all that awaits them is the fate of migratory workers, notoriously the most depressed stratum of the farm population. Mr. Steinbeck spares us not a single scene, not a single sensation, that could help to implicate us emotionally. And he is so much in earnest that a number of times he interrupts his story in order to grapple directly with his thesis. Thus several chapters are devoted to outright political preaching from the standpoint of a kind of homespun revolutionary populism.

But the novel is far too didactic and long-winded. In addition

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to the defects that are peculiar to his own manner, Mr. Steinbeck has assembled in this one book all the familiar faults of the "proletarian" literary mode. There are the usual idealized portraits and the customary conversions, psychologically false and schematic as ever, to militant principles. Moreover, the technical cleverness displayed in *Of Mice and Men* is lacking in this novel, which should be credited with valid political observation and sincere feeling, but which fails on the test of craftsmanship. Its unconscionable length is out of all proportion to its substance; the 'ornery' dialect spoken by its farmers impresses one as being less a form of human speech than a facile convention of the local-color schools; and as to problems of characterization, Mr. Steinbeck does not so much create character as he apes it. For aping, too, can be turned into a means of "re-creating" life. It would appear from this and similar novels that on a sufficiently elementary level, and so long as a uniform scheme of behavior—however simple—is imposed upon characters, all a fiction writer requires to make his people seem real is the patience to follow them everywhere, the perseverance to copy down everything they say and everything they do.

At long last we come to Mr. Robert Penn Warren's *Night Rider,* patently the most distinguished work on my list. Known as a poet and literary critic, Mr. Warren has achieved the seemingly impossible: his first novel shows none of the strains and shifts that ordinarily mar such prose narratives as poets and critics have been able to produce. *Night Rider,* manifesting an almost classic normality of form and rare qualities of a dramatic and pictorial order, is told with so much ease and power that its author can be said to have attained in one bound a leading position among American novelists.

Mr. Warren has designed his narrative on more than one plane. Its exterior reality is that of the strife in Kentucky, some thirty-five years ago, between the tobacco farmers and the tobacco trust, while within or behind it there exists the interior reality of the moral process and of the hazards and mutations of personality. And the inner and outer themes are unified by a constant exchange of meaning, by a never-interrupted dialogue between the visible act and its psychic shadow.

The problem of identity is deeply implanted in the novel. Percy Munn, whose life is overpowered by the passions and cruelty of the tobacco war, feels that if he only knew who he is he would surely know how to resolve his bewilderment. In a numb, awkward fashion he attempts to arrest the loss of inner continuity. He tries to fathom the ambiguous connections between things done and things remembered, between the present self and the vanishing and perhaps

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

contrary selves of the past. But since "the future was dead and rotten in his breast, the past, too, which once had seemed to him to have its patterns, began to fall apart, act by act, incident by incident, thought by thought, each item into brutish separateness. . . ." His sense of identity cannot withstand the shock of his experience and, finally, he wills his own destruction. And in some obscure way one perceives that the disintegration of Munn, though the reasons for it in the story are immediate and specific, may have its larger implications. Possibly its meaning relates to that compulsive element in the history of the South whose objective equivalent in its literature is the obsessive theme of violence and death.

But aside from its value as a psychological fable, *Night Rider* is exceptional for its vivid, sensuous writing, and for its realistic picture of sectional life. It has, however, its opaque side. Given the desperate economic struggle in which Munn acts as a leader, we are never certain whether his fate is being determined by forces in the main social and impersonal, or whether the objective events serve merely to provoke his own intrinsic temper. The author, of course, draws both curves of determination, but the way in which they interact is not quite clear. Still, despite this uncertainty, Munn is wholly convincing, and Bill Christian, Lucille, Senator Tolliver, Doctor MacDonald, and Willie Proudfit are equally real. Willie Proudfit's tale of the frontier days forms an heroic chapter recalling the lost innocence of the continent as well as the terror of its subjugation. There are at least half a dozen superb scenes of action, such as the search of the Negro cabins by deputies and the burning of the warehouses in Bardsville by the night riders; and from the less resounding parts I would single out for comment that wonderful passage, rendered through the memory of Munn, which tells about a Miss Ianthe Sprague of Philadelphia. Resembling a species of marine life, this ageing and nondescript spinster is unforgettable.

Miss Katherine Anne Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider,* a collection of three long stories, calls forth the reflection that the rewards gained by the ardors and refinements of composition are still unique. Of the three stories, "Noon Wine" is the most perfectly constructed and at the same time a story that one would have least expected to find in this volume. Dealing with mad doings in the countryside—such as Erskine Caldwell is fond of—it is developed with so much lucidity as to give enduring literary form to a pervasive native theme. The other two narratives proceed more closely along the lines of Miss Porter's typical manner. But at this late date, after the critics have discussed these stories at length and with abounding sympathy, little is left to say except to regret that, publishing as seldom as she does, Miss Porter allows us to read her only at such rare intervals.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Books

WHITMAN AND ARNOLD

WHITMAN. By Newton Arvin. Macmillan. $2.75.
MATTHEW ARNOLD. By Lionel Trilling. W. W. Norton. $2.50.

It was only natural that Walt Whitman should have seen Matthew Arnold as the guardian of British gentility, and that Arnold in turn should have said that Whitman's poetry achieved originality only at the expense of genuine culture. They were far apart in temperament and training; and, in addition, each one reflected the condition of his national culture to a greater degree, perhaps, than any other contemporary figure. Whitman, the great commoner, expressed the excitements of an expanding society and its prospects of a freer and more abundant life; Arnold attempted to release the humanist tradition from the dogmas of existing institutions and, at the same time, to save it from the attacks of nineteenth century materialism.

In the structure of their thinking they had little in common. Yet they were facing the same social and intellectual predicament. For while both were influenced by the libertarian ideals of the Enlightenment and looked to their realization in an ultimate community of material and cultural interests, they could not fail to observe that the growing injustices and vulgarities of a competitive economy presented a serious challenge to their faith. Even their solutions—heroic in Whitman's case, and militantly urbane in Arnold's—were in large measure elaborate restatements of their common predicament, for the theories they advanced were often entangled with the prejudices they were ostensibly combating. If Whitman was optimistic, it was because he transformed his belief in the innate virtues of man into a general teleology of progress. Arnold, on the other hand, was somewhat less confident—the tensions were greater in England than in America—but he, too, did not question the possibility of a natural evolution, with the aid of reforms, toward higher levels of culture and equality.

Unfortunately, the legends which have enveloped both men have obscured their common tasks as well as their distinct contributions: Arnold has become the darling of the academies, Whitman the god-father of every populist crank. It is a good thing, therefore, that scholarly biographies of both men should have appeared

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this year. For, whatever the merits of each study, they provide at least the documentary clues to the understanding of Arnold and Whitman. The authors, Lionel Trilling and Newton Arvin are exponents of the historical and materialist mode of criticism which has grown up during the last decade in this country. Hence they have investigated the social worlds of Arnold and Whitman to explain the meaning as well as the origin of their ideas. But here the similarity ends: for where Trilling applies himself to the full scope and intricacy of Arnold's thought, Arvin seems more intent on bringing Whitman up to date by smoothing out his nineteenth century wrinkles.

In this respect, Arvin illustrates the tendency to revaluate writers according to some political doctrine of the moment. Some years ago sectarian critics were concerned chiefly with the revolutionary sympathies of the writer; today writers of the past are being matriculated in the recently established school of democratic progressivism. But despite the shift in perspective, the emphasis continues to be on the relation of the writer's political opinions to current political needs. Thus Arvin states that his "main concern" is to decide whether Whitman was a *socialist poet,* and he goes about this task not through an analysis of the consciousness that emerged in his poetry, but by assembling Whitman's views, as stated in conversation as well as in writing, on the working class, science, philosophy, the Civil War, and socialism itself. The result was of course predictable—a mass of violent and contradictory attitudes. And though Arvin attempts to solve the contradictions by interpreting those views of Whitman which are patently non-socialist as momentary lapses in the general trend of his thought, and by reading the modern theory of socialism back into Whitman's vision of a greater democracy, the numerous qualifications Arvin is forced to make come close to vitiating his general conclusions. In fact his researches serve only to convince us that it is not as a student of political affairs that Whitman will be remembered.

The meaning of Whitman is obviously to be found in his poetry and not in his opinions, for it is in his poetry that Whitman's plebeian instincts and personal optimism merged with the social currents that shaped the thought of his time. And a perception of the resulting poetic qualities hardly needs the ideological justifications that Arvin has set up. Intellectually, Whitman stood at the junction of agrarian America and the growing industrialism; hence he combined the old equalitarian longings and the legend of self-reliance with the scientific materialism and the solidarity of the multitude that came from the city. But what distinguished Whitman, and gave his poetry, I believe, its unusual energy, was the projection of his very being into the variety of impulses that made up American life. His celebration of democracy, for example,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

created large images of physical association, and his pantheism was tempered by a sense of participation in the actual labors of mankind. Even if his poetry, like his general beliefs, did not resolve the conflicting tendencies about him, still it achieved a remarkable fusion of the expansive ego of the individual with the urgent tasks of society.

Arnold, on the other hand, worked within the established tradition of British thought, and if he too was unable to reach a satisfactory resolution, it was largely because he could not make a sufficient break with the past. Resting as it did on the contradiction between those two great opposing forces of the nineteenth century, science and theology, it was inevitable that much of his work should be made up of incompatible elements. Unlike Arvin's, however, Trilling's "biography of Arnold's mind" does not attempt to recast Arnold in our own image: on the contrary, Trilling's book is an extremely intelligent and exhaustive analysis of the organic consistency and logical inconsistency of Arnold's thought. If one were to quarrel at all with Trilling's method, it would be to point out that it is somewhat diffuse and overburdened with details and quotations. But it would be captious to stress these faults when we consider that Trilling's extraordinary fidelity to the subject makes his book one of the best works of historical criticism produced in this country.

What is perhaps most remarkable about Arnold's career is that, though primarily a man of letters, he crossed swords with the most pressing cultural and social problems. His thought-span, as Trilling tells us, covered the functions of criticism, the uses of theology, the place of science, methods of education, the theory of the state, and the political role of the working class. But however wide may have been the spread of his interests, they all revolve around a concern for the survival of British civilization. France had already been shaken up in 1789, and all of Europe in 1848. Class differentiation was growing, and Arnold feared the anarchy that might result from further upheavals. Yet the picture on the side of conservatism was scarcely more attractive, for the aristocracy was dying, the middle class was becoming more philistine and less stable, and the symbols of religious and governmental authority were being questioned by the findings of science. Arnold's solution, as Trilling points out, was in the nature of a compromise: hence he was constantly tossed between conservative theories of order and revolutionary theories of freedom. Originally embarking, like most nineteenth century critics of society, on a criticism of religion, he soon began to retrace his steps, and he ended with a secular version of religion and a clerical version of society. He professed sympathy for the social aims of the French Revolution and the Paris Commune, yet he found their moral values unacceptable. He was committed to the principle of individual conscience and conviction, yet he constructed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a morality of checks and balances. And Arnold's conception of the strong state as a firm base for Culture, that is, as a central discipline to check the growing anarchy of thought, is a striking example of Arnold's life-long effort to reconcile the principle of reason with the principle of authority.

As Trilling shows, Arnold's literary criticism was bound up with his theories of social reform. He believed, for example, that a heroic society was necessary for a truly noble and tragic literature, and he expected that poetry would take on the function of unifying and refining man's values which had been performed in the past by religion and philosophy. Even his theory of "the grand style" flowed from the serious and dignifying aims he attributed to literature. As a result, much of his own poetry was academic and his criticism had a hygienic tone which is somewhat alien to modern taste. Yet his sensitiveness to the modulations of contemporary thought saved his poetry from the facile optimism of so much Victorian writing. And Arnold's social interests may be said to have led to that awareness of the responsibilities of literature to the general needs of humanity which has had so great an influence on subsequent criticism.

Both biographies seek to define the relevance of Arnold and Whitman to our time. And both suggest that Arnold's "ideal of order, of peace and of unity" and Whitman's democratic enthusiasm might well be rediscovered at a time of social frustration and intellectual panic. Yet the methods of historical analysis employed by Trilling and Arvin have very little in common. Arvin, apparently conceiving the present as but the prolongation of the past, ascribes to Whitman the values of "contemporaneity". Trilling, on the other hand, finds in our consciousness the necessary detachment for a more objective view of the past than it was able to have of itself. Hence Trilling's admiration of Arnold comes not from any suspension of criticism but rather from a recognition that Arnold's "failures in judgment" did not diminish the largeness of his aims.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS

THE POET'S RESPONSIBILITIES

IN DREAMS BEGIN RESPONSIBILITIES. By Delmore Schwartz. New Directions. $2.50.

Mr. Schwartz' first book has had an unusually good press; it has been praised for a variety of qualities and has been generally accepted as a fresh expression of poetic energy. The words made welcome music and the promise of music; not so much particular words or particular music, I think, but generally—what is a great deal—words and music just the same. One has the double advan-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tage, in coming late as a reviewer, of general concurrence, and of being able without injustice to isolate one or two points for emphasis. One can write a little as if the reader already knew what the poems are about; better, one can think as if oneself knew—and if there is injustice there it should be the less felt, being at a second remove.

What the poems are about, so far as this review goes, is in this distich from "Faust in Old Age":

> Spontaneous, I have too much to say,
> And what I say will no one not old see;

in this line from "The Beautiful American Word, Sure":

> In dark accidents the mind's sufficient grace;

And, as an example of such an accident in the poetic sense, in this passage from "Dr. Bergen's Belief":

> But every side is wrong, but every man
> Is guilty, every child is used, and now
> Effort is useful as spitting in the sea,
> Good and evil are merely expressions of pain
> In the perpetual return of the blind night
> And the bit by bit disorder of the rain.

Other lines and passages could be added to articulate the skeleton; Freud and Marx; Ego and Ennui; Mozart and Socrates; Yeats, Cummings, Eliot and Stevens; and added on the very basis of the distich above. Mr. Schwartz has spontaneity, the gift of speech, together with that slant, that deep inclination, towards maturity, which has not yet saved him from that glibness which is lack of subject-matter. We see him resort to the artifice of getting under way, no matter where, and accepting whatever wind or spirit proposes. "Coriolanus and His Mother" is an example; almost avowedly in the prose interludes, where the speaker works himself up into saying something, which by the very process of the working up seems significant or ominous; but also in the verse sections, where the names of Marx, Freud, Aristotle, Beethoven, and so on, *people* the thoughts and images. It should be observed that a good deal gets done by these artifices; the artifice may become actual like Yeats' artifice of eternity, or it may not; but meanwhile what gets done, though not satisfying, is exacting and exciting. If there is an error in the poet's conduct of affairs it is that he has applied psychological form, which we *know* is appropriate to drama, to philosophical subject-matter, where the appropriateness is questionable. (One risks that such transposition is appropriate to moral philosophy, which I risk as a poet not as a philosopher, but applied to any other branch will probably produce amorphous substance and inadequate objectivity regardless of the verbal or metrical merit of the medium in which the transposition is made; one can hardly be aware of, and therefore cannot manage, *all* the forms one is using

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at one time: a major reason why poetry is so much in passages, and the rest haunted.)

Yet the spontaneity which, extended, corrupts the forms of "Coriolanus" leaving it sound only in sections, is the probable source or at any rate the intimation of order for almost all that is most successful in the book. Spontaneity, the gift of speech, is also the factory of awareness, of recognition, insight, discrimination. If one lets oneself go within the limits of a manageable form (assuming one has enough to let go) there will emerge the dark accidents of the mind's sufficient grace. Mr. Schwartz is able to do this to one degree or another rather more often than not. The title story, "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities," lets go of a pure fantasy: one sees as in a movie how it was when one's father and mother got engaged and went to Coney Island and quarrelled in a Fortune-teller's booth; then one is put out of the theatre for crying out commonsense warning. The fantasy becomes a fable and in its new atmosphere gains meaning in the form of intimation much faster than the logical mind can keep up with. The materials of presumptive perception have worked upon each other under the pressure of the form, let us say, meaning that one immediately thinks that one could manage effects as good as pressing one's own motion into fable; and in the synergy is a poetic order. It seems to me that "Dr. Bergen's Belief" is similarly a fable-play, a presented fable, and not a play at all; not an enactment of conflict, but an almost helter-skelter descriptive recitation of a predicament of belief: What can man ask to have? made orderly, in the poetic sense, because felt as fable. The dramatic form is so frailly present as not to interfere with but only prop politely the contemplative backward movement into the fable. Mr. Schwartz has not mastered his peculiar form; it is not everywhere equal to the demands of his sensibility, nor does it always seem able to possess itself of a subject-matter; but he has felt the incentive and worked on it cleanly, as a poet, not as a beggar. The form, as illustrated in the story, the play, and in separable parts of "Coriolanus," would seem to be fertile, seminal for us, in our day; that is, capable of coping with our subject-matter when we find it. That is a good deal to illustrate.

Elsewhere, in the shorter poems in the book, which because they are shorter we are likely to think of as less ambitious but which are doubtless as honest to their intent as the longer works, we find naturally (it is the same man writing) the same tendency towards the mature perception of the bit by bit disorder of the rain. Some of course are merely exercise bits, more imitative than intimate, and therefore quite clear and easily exhaustible. But in others, some whole and some in part, there is at its own level an inexhaustible quality in the perception which the associations of image and statement reveal. That is not to say anything of Mr. Schwartz's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rank as a poet; it is only to say that he works his materials upon each other, and the results work upon the reader; which is poet's work. I think especially of "At This Moment of Time," "The Ballet of the Fifth Year," and "Far Rockaway." Others, as I know, have a different choice; which is further witness.

R. P. BLACKMUR

A BELATED DIALECTICIAN

THE MARXIST PHILOSOPHY AND THE SCIENCES. By J. B. S. Haldane. Random House. $2.50.

This is a naive, and rather pathetic book. Professor Haldane has come to the true faith late in life; like so many similar *convertis,* he is as eager and awkward as a middle-aged bridegroom. "I am by no means qualified to speak on Marxism [a word he confuses with Stalinism]," he notes disarmingly in his first paragraph. "I have only been a Marxist for about a year." This lack—enough, one would think, to daunt many a bold man, and especially, perhaps, a scientist—does not in the least restrain Professor Haldane from writing his book, nor his publishers from insisting in their blurb, that "it is required reading for an understanding of the forces in thought and action that are re-shaping the modern world."

Professor Haldane explains why he gave the lectures upon which his book is based: "My own reason for delivering these lectures is a different one. I think that Marxism is true." He is going to try to prove that he is correct in his opinion. He is a scientist, and "in these lectures, we shall mainly be concerned with the relationship of Marxism to science." What, then, is the Marxism which he is to prove true and to study in relationship to the sciences? Professor Haldane is not altogether clear about what he means by Marxism, but he explains that his primary concern is with "dialectical materialism."

Dialectical materialism consists chiefly of three principles. "One of them is the principle of the unity of opposites." "The second principle is the passage of quantity into quality, and conversely." "A third principle, which is perhaps the most important, is what is called the negation of the negation."

Having cleared up Marxism in his first chapter, Haldane devotes the rest of his space to popularized accounts of recent developments in mathematics, quantum theory, chemistry, biology, psychology and sociology. Presumably these scientific developments are supposed to prove his thesis that Marxism, meaning the three principles of dialectical materialism, is true.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Let us examine the principles a little more closely, and try to see how, if at all, they might be proved "true." First, let us observe that the principles are not *stated* but only *named.* The first, for example, is that "of the unity of opposites." But what about the unity of opposites? what does the principle say, or claim, concerning the unity of opposites? Professor Haldane does not enlighten us.

Further: what are "opposites"? We use the word loosely in common sense, relying on the context to give a rough approximation to our meaning. Logic and science must be more precise. The word "opposites," among its other meanings, may refer to: (1) "contradictories"—*i.e.,* two sentences in such a logical relation that one of them must be true and both cannot be true; (2) "contraries"—*i.e.,* two sentences in such a logical relation that one of them must be false and both may be false; (3) points, angles, lines, and other geometrical terms having certain geometrical relations with each other; (4) two human beings (or other animals) or groups of humans who are in physical *conflict* with each other; (5) or simply two particulars which are "different" from each other—a relation so general and purely formal that it may, in one way or another, be interpreted as applying to any two discrete terms, things or events.

The second and third principles may be analyzed linguistically in an analogous manner.

The vagueness of the alleged principles of dialectical materialism is not accidental. The fault here is not Haldane's, but is common to all who have written about them, from Engels on. It is impossible to specify what the principles mean; and it is therefore absurd to argue whether they are true or false: they are neither true nor false.

Those who believe in these principles claim that they give us information, that, as they put it, they are "objective" laws of the physical universe; in other words, that they are empirically significant (and also true). If they give us information, if they are empirically significant, they must be capable of interpretation in terms of precise experimental and observational procedures, and, reasoning from them by the accepted rules of inference, we must be able to make specific predictions about future observations. These are criteria for the significance of any empirical law.

Professor Haldane, as scientist, knows this. In Chapter 3 he discusses the "doctrine of universal determinism", and rejects the doctrine, not as false, but as *meaningless.* His criterion is the same that I propose for him. "But the question of whether all future events are absolutely determined today seems to me meaningless unless it can be tested. And unless it can be tested by reference to the knowledge of an omniscient being [which Haldane of course rules out] I can see no method of checking it as ordinary scientific theories are checked. And, therefore . . . we had better scrap the idea of determinism, at least as understood by Laplace."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In his entire book, Haldane does not use a single word to explain how the three principles of dialectical materialism might be *tested;* he makes no single prediction on the logical basis of the principles, nor does he give any example from the past of such a prediction's having been made by himself or by anyone else; he neither establishes nor even attempts to establish any logical relation between the principles and any of the scientific theories he talks about. He does none of these things, nor does nor can anyone else. He gives the show away when he writes: "Now I do not want to suggest that Engels predicted quantum mechanics. Engels had before his eyes the awful example of Hegel when he ventured into the philosophy of nature, and in consequence he steered very wide of too detailed predictions in the scientific field." Here, indeed, must Engels' ghost feel faint with damned praise. For that steering wide of detailed predictions is exactly what betrays that the principles are without scientific significance.

Let me then apply Haldane to himself, and paraphrase: "But the question of the principles of dialectical materialism today seems to me meaningless unless it can be tested. . . I can see no method of checking it as ordinary scientific theories are checked. And, therefore . . . we had better scrap the idea of dialectical materialism, at least as understood by Engels."

The *methodological* analysis which concludes that the principles are empirically meaningless does not, however, in the least deny their *historical* importance. The principles can best be understood as *metaphors.* Through them Marx and Engels seem to have expressed: their dissatisfaction with the usual "substantive" approach of the traditional philosophers; their disagreement with the mechanical materialism of the 18th century; and above all their rejection of gradualist methods in politics, their insistence on the irreconcilability of the major class conflict in modern society, and their contention that the social revolution could be brought about only through political revolution.

It is historically true, also, that most attacks on dialectical materialism, from Marx's own time up to our day of Hooks and Eastmans, have been, in their political meaning, ideological masks for attacks on revolutionary *politics.* The defense of dialectical materialism from these attacks has thus often (though by no means invariably—the Soviet philosophers and the sectarians are today the most vocal and lengthy defenders) served indirectly a progressive political function.

But these metaphysical principles of dialectical materialism survive now only as out-lived, vestigial remnants. Like the vermiform appendix in man, they are at best useless; and they are liable to dangerous infections. They can become dangerous because: (1) They are without testable meaning content, and are so vague

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that they may be manipulated to *justify,* seemingly, any course of action whatever—as they are manipulated by the Russians to justify Stalinism or by Matticks and Oehlers to justify their sectarian absurdities. (2) When they intrude upon the scientific analyses of Marxists, they can obscure and confuse the accurate predictions of the future upon which successful political action rests. (3) They give political opponents a smokescreen behind which to hide, even sometimes from themselves, their political struggle against revolutionary politics and the revolutionary movement.

Let us, then, perform the necessary operation, and remove this appendix from the *corpus* of Marxism. And let us take our clear point of departure from Marxism understood first and most profoundly as the science and art of the social revolution.

JAMES BURNHAM

THE PIRENNE THESIS

A HISTORY OF EUROPE. From the Invasions to the XVI Century. By Henri Pirenne. W. W. Norton. $5.00.

Although he is only beginning to be widely known in this country, the late Henri Pirenne has long held an extraordinary reputation abroad in his field: medieval history. Almost single-handed, he displaced four centuries of historical stereotypes. From the time of the Italian Humanists, the medieval period had been the battle-ground for the warring ideologies of the day. The Humanists found in the Middle Ages only a criminal gothic inattention to the niceties of Ciceronian eloquence, and the Enlightenment saw only the depths of irrationalism and priestcraft. The nineteenth century, with its confident individualism, hailed the emergence of self-conscious freedom in the Renaissance. Nor were the modern schools any freer from bias. Nationalism, as Pirenne himself saw, was transforming history into national chauvinism; clericalism was reducing the facts to denominational requirements; and there was a growing body of proto-fascist thought which found in the feudal corporation refuge from capitalism and Marxism. Nothing could be stranger than Henri Pirenne's call at this point for "scientific universal history."

Indeed, Pirenne was something of a small miracle in historiography. Most of his colleagues were engaged with paleography and technical feats of scholarship. Most of his teachers—even when, somehow, they had come to grips with central economic issues—were caught in the arid legalism of the constitutional approach. But this son of a merchant came to write the exciting history of the bourgeoisie, to trace the emergence of an historic class. And he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brought with him something of that "capitalist spirit" for which he had so much respect—an adventurous sense of freedom, a rough intelligence, and an impulse to find new techniques for new tasks. At any rate, Pirenne broke cleanly with every bourgeois tradition in European historiography to rethink the problems of the medieval period in terms of a changing, developing economy and shifting class alignments.

It was the rise of bourgeois civilization with which Pirenne was largely concerned. In point of fact, his earliest and most valuable original research was on the growth of towns. For Pirenne that urban transformation of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was the central and crucial phenomenon of modern Europe; it was the significant Renaissance. Around that pivotal development he built his interpretation of medieval life and society in a series of dramatic theses which have ranked the great Belgian among the most outstanding historical minds of our time. In *Medieval Cities* and in his remarkable *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe* they are given their most precise formulation.

In this strange and brilliant general *History of Europe* they are restated, in certain respects more loosely and erratically, in others far more wonderfully, than before. For it was during the World War that Pirenne was first given an opportunity to write this general work which he had planned for so long. He had been taken prisoner by the Germans, and alone in a war-camp cell he thought back over his years of study. Interned a few months later in a little German town, he proceeded, without a single note, to write this tremendous volume—because, as he said, "the essential thing is to kill time and not allow oneself to be killed by it." Published four years after his death, and some twenty years after the writing, with no revisions, it works out once again his classic outline of the main stages in the history of medieval Europe.

The Pirenne thesis was striking and attractively simple. It denied, in the first place, the old historical stereotype of the cataclysmic collapse of the Roman Empire with the barbarian invasions. The essential characteristics of the ancient world, it was Pirenne's claim, survived intact—international trade and town life remained to give a commercial foundation to Mediterranean civilization. The world-order lived on, but then came Islam. Before the onslaughts of the Moslem invaders, the West fell back. The double-edged Crescent had cut it off both from the East and the Sea. Civilization in the ninth century broke sharply with the civilization of antiquity, for it saw the hardening of the great artery of commerce in the closing of the Mediterranean. The rupture with the old economy produced feudalism: land became the sole source of subsistence and the sole condition of wealth. In Pirenne's phrase, "Mahomet gave rise to Charlemagne." The transition from this economy of consumption to a capitalist economy of markets and exchange involved

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the rise of towns. And here Pirenne revised all the standing views of the problem with his mercatorial theory: the town was the new creation of the merchant, it was a fortress for the bourgeoisie, developing within the womb of the old society. That development meant, of course, the penetration of the medieval world with the new commercial forms of money and credit, and subsequently the bourgeois-democratic revolutions for political power.

There was, however, one implication in such a simple and direct statement of the birth of capitalism that Pirenne warned against, brilliantly calling attention to one of the most significant aspects of the new society. The development of the bourgeoisie, he insisted, was not a linear one. And he pointed to the consistent and irresistible obsolescence of the upper cadres of the bourgeoisie. Inevitably the bourgeois becomes an oligarch, conscientiously withdrawing from productive activities, and leaving the fulfillment of the progressive tasks of capitalist advance to a new group of entrepreneurs, who metamorphose in the same way. Here, clearly, are the economic roots of the modern leisure-class. In a sense Pirenne is the necessary historical introduction to Thorstein Veblen.

Pirenne made, it seems, an important distinction between economic motives and *meanings*. The motive was a matter of *fact*, which investigation would or would not reveal; yet economic motive or no, the *meaning* of historical phenomena he formulated with reference to the economic organization of society. I stress this point because Pirenne is perhaps the single instance of a bourgeois historian who embraced a materialist interpretation, and yet managed to shake free from vulgar economic determinism, without a final resort to some sort of idealism. (Beard and Turner among American historians are striking victims of this cycle.) This approach in Pirenne, however, can not truly be seen as methodological sophistication; he was pressed to such a position by certain peculiar biases. As the historian of the early bourgeoisie, he combined basic insights into the nature of the class with a half-romantic attachment to its "historic mission." Pirenne knew capitalism meant social progress. But he saw all too clearly the inexorable development of the intelligent enterprising bourgeois into a ruthlessly exploitative and parasitic patrician. And although he constantly looked forward with confidence to the renewal of progressive productive activities with the emergence of a new bourgeoisie, he was forced to a genuine sympathy with the masses in their class struggles: his sympathies were with revolution, for revolution meant reform. Clearly, though, he never looked a revolution squarely in the face. It is significant that Thomas Münzer, whom Engels and Kautsky had hailed as the brilliant revolutionary tactician of the Peasant Wars, represents for Pirenne "mystical Terror." In a real sense, Pirenne had formulated an ideology for the progressive section of the bourgeoisie, and had taken it over for himself.

MELVIN J. LASKY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FURTHER TESTIMONY

PICASSO. By Gertrude Stein. Scribner's. $3.00.

Braque's contribution to the *Testimony against Gertrude Stein* (*Transition* 1935) was the briefest in the series, for it merely enlarged upon a single observation, that "Miss Stein understood nothing of what went on around her." The present volume demonstrates that she certainly understood very little about the painting that went on around her. For the vast and complex subject of Picasso's life and work, which should have been handled with considerable honesty, taste, and insight, has come to us embellished with countless tidy inaccuracies and neatly-phrased morsels of misinformation.

The book begins very cleverly, and the opening sentence sets the key: "Painting in the nineteenth century was only done in France and by Frenchmen, apart from that, painting did not exist, in the twentieth century it was done in France but by Spaniards." The first of these concise pronouncements seems hardly fair to Van Gogh, while the second tends to overlook Matisse, Braque, Léger, and a number of lesser Gallic luminaries. There are more ambitious critical hypotheses scattered throughout the volume which will probably lead many innocent readers astray. At one point Miss Stein works up a thoroughly eloquent analysis of Picasso's cubism, with arguments to explain how it differs from French cubism. She concludes: "Nature and man are opposed in Spain, they agree in France and this is the difference between French cubism and Spanish cubism and it is a fundamental difference." A drawback to Miss Stein's diagnosis is the recollection that fine cubist pictures are usually notable for their similarity; it has become legendary that at the early cubist exhibitions Picasso and Braque were sometimes amused at their inability to tell their own works apart.

It is ironical, in the light of such limitations, that it should be chiefly when Miss Stein writes of these contemporary painters that she is brought into touch with her widest reading public. And this is not entirely to be deplored, for Miss Stein's vast literary equipment is nowhere more impressive than in such monographs of the Parisian artists. Whether or not she understands the significance of their works, she manages to retain an uncanny gift for transcribing into her own medium the rudiments of a visual conception. By subtle suggestion she is able to convey what a picture looks like, and an artist's works, actions, and comments become woven together through that flow of spoken tones which she has brought back to literature with a new intensity. The present volume, to be sure, does not reach the verbal solemnity and eloquence of her *Life and*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Death of Juan Gris. Perhaps because the subject-matter in Picasso's career is more sensational, the approach would seem to become naturally more journalistic. Yet the familiar Stein mastery of echo and cadence is still employed with undiminished sensibility, and the scarcely perceptible repetitions beat through the paragraphs like the steadying measures of a figured bass. So it is that there are many writers who can recount an anecdote more accurately than Miss Stein, but no one could integrate a conversation more engagingly than this:

> "As I was saying, in the daily living it is another thing. A friend built a modern house and he suggested that Picasso too should have one built. But, said Picasso, of course not, I want an old house. Imagine, he said, if Michael Angelo would have been pleased if some one had given him a fine piece of Renaissance furniture, not at all. He would have been pleased if he had been given a beautiful Greek intaglio, of course."

It is unfortunate for Americans that the book so unfailingly jars when it reaches specifically esthetic grounds. For Miss Stein's inability to distinguish between good pictures and bad has wrought havoc with the sixty-odd illustrations that support her text. This selection will certainly not enhance Picasso's reputation, which is distressing, when one considers the equally inferior examples by which many are fated to know him through the New York commercial galleries.

GEORGE L. K. MORRIS

LETTERS

Paris, France.

To the Editors:

Thanks for the *Partisan Reviews*, they really did interest me, I must say you have made it fairly readable which is always the most difficult thing to do, I rarely can read a magazine but I did that, which may be bad praise as I certainly have not a magazine taste, well anyway we will hope for the best, and that it is a compliment, and some time I will send you some poems if you like, and thanks again. . .

Always,
Gertrude Stein

Cambridge, Mass.

To the Editors:

In Harold Rosenberg's essay on Thomas Mann, there is no justification that I can see for making Mynheer Peeperkorn and Cipolla central to Mann's view, past or present, of the world. Nor is Hans Castorp in any literal sense a "hero." The question of Peeperkorn is most important, I believe: like Naphta and Settembrini, he embodies a certain structure of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

attitudes; his position in the novel is less considerable than are those of the other two, and the limitations, indeed the absurdities, of his attitudes are made unmistakable (see the scene by the waterfall). Peeperkorn fascinates Hans Castorp, not Thomas Mann: Rosenberg's fallacy is—to use the trite example—that of identifying Polonius with Shakespeare. There is more involved here than a choice of interpretations, I am afraid, because for me there is unpleasant innuendo in the handling of the quotations in this crucial section of the essay, and in the subtitle, "Duty and the Great Leader," which precedes it.

Yours very truly,
Howard Baker

Washington, D. C.

To the Editors:

I am grateful to Mr. Baker for his interest in my interpretation, and to P. R. for the opportunity of clarifying further one or two points.

My essay attempted, among other things, to show the place occupied by Mann's characters within his allegorical scheme. If Peeperkorn, Castorp, Naphta, etc. merely represented "certain structures of attitudes," Mann's work could not have accomplished its triumphant artistic formulation of present-day cultural universals. Baker has made the error of reading *The Magic Mountain* as if it were a simple dramatic narrative, (which would have a value of another kind), rather than a world-embracing allegory.

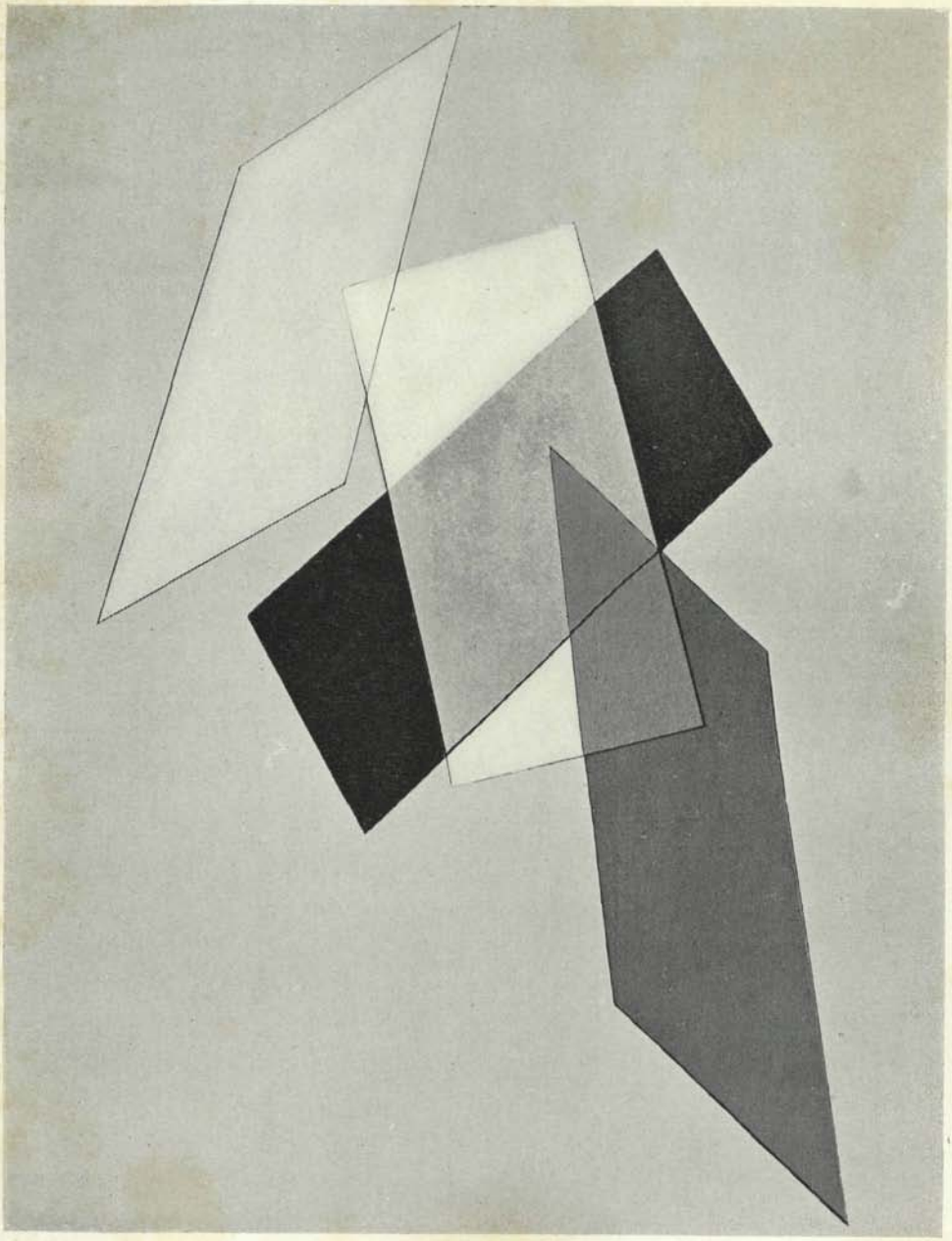
Now within this philosophic structure, Peeperkorn is enthroned in the highest and most mysterious position as "uniter" and "life-giver." And though Mann is aware of the contradictions in the ideal of the Leader, and is also lively and artistically subtle in poking good-natured fun at its friendly personifications, the power of the élite, in its dual creative and destructive aspects, is, as I said, "the peak of his vision." This is of course further borne out by the elaboration of the same theme in the *Joseph.*

Since Baker is dissatisfied with my quotations, may I give him another, this time from the waterfall scene? Here Mann, not Castorp, is describing the irresistible influence of Peeperkorn over the group: "What could the others do? In such matters he was accustomed to command, and the weight of his personality would always have been decisive, even if he had not been, as he was, master and mover of the expedition. Size itself is tyrannical, autocratic; thus it has always been, thus it will remain. Mynheer desired to eat in sight, in thunderous hearing of the waterfall, it was his mighty will. Who did not wish to go hungry must acquiesce."

Very truly yours,
Harold Rosenberg

P.S. It is Mann himself, who, no doubt ironically, refers to Castorp as "my hero" in the interview quoted by me (P.R., pg.29).

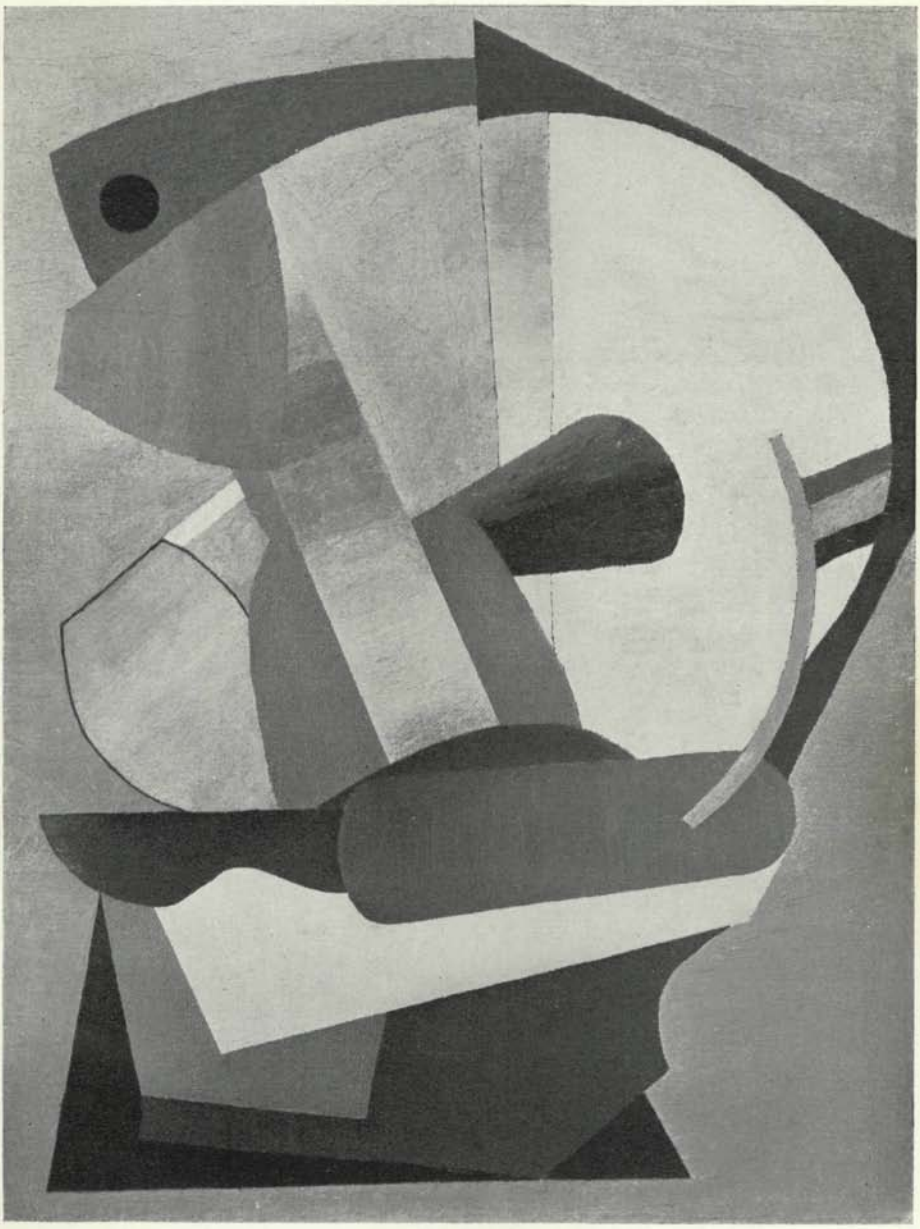
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Charles G. Shaw; Abstraction 1939
Riverside Museum, New York

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

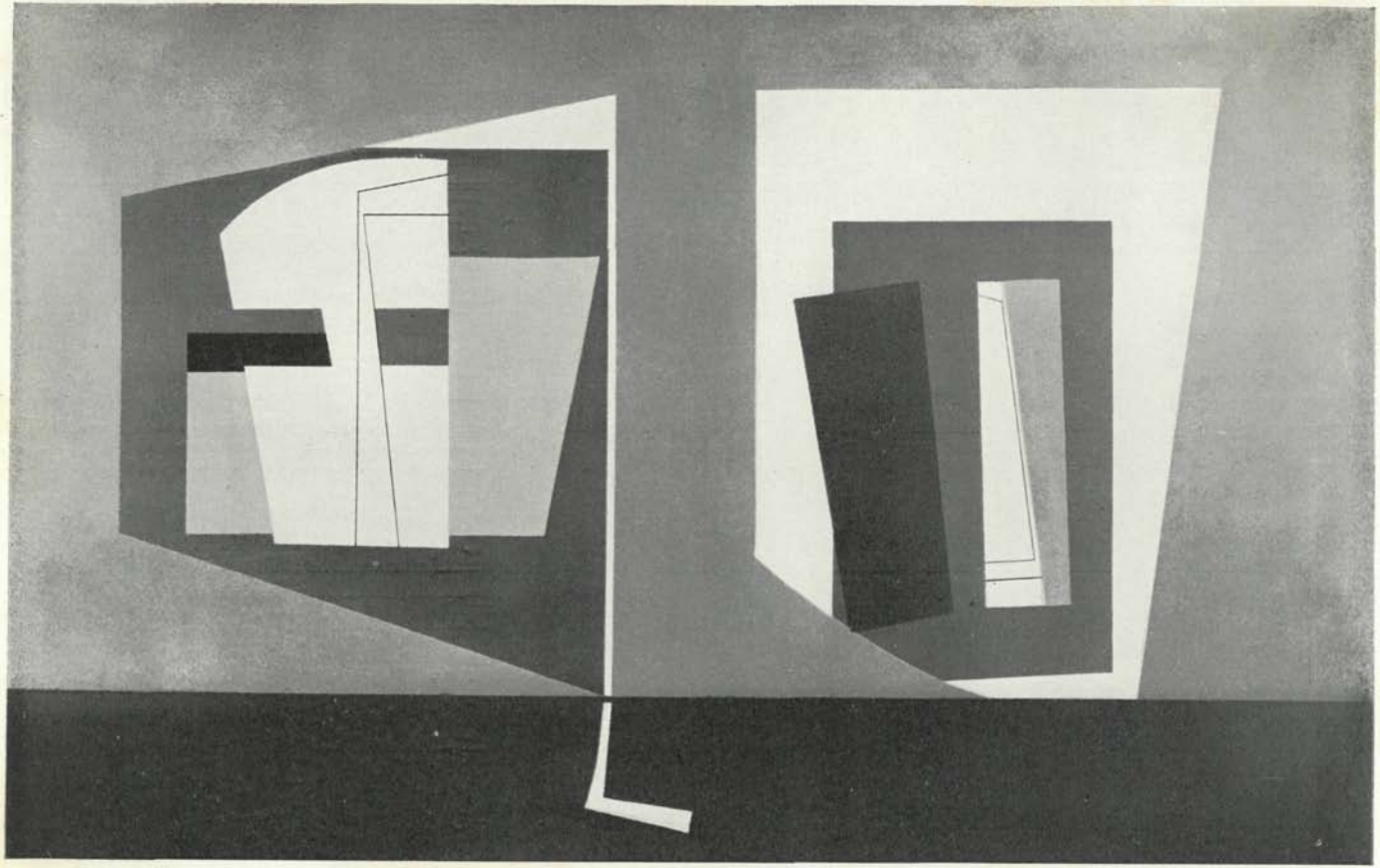
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



A. E. Gallatin; Composition 1939
Riverside Museum, New York

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Balcomb Greene; Mural Composition

Hall of Medical Science, New York World's Fair 1939

(Executed for the Federal Arts Project)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE INTERNATIONAL REVIEW
continues its work—

The issues of 1939 contain:

UNSCRAMBLING THE IMPERIALIST MELEE. An astounding analysis of the world political situation by one of Europe's keenest minds.

WHAT NEXT FOR ORGANIZED LABOR IN THE UNITED STATES? By Sylvis. A frank account of the condition of American trade unionism and the prospects faced by the promoters of a Farmer-Labor Party.

"RADICAL" TRADITIONALISM. By E. L. Roof. A study of the illusions surviving parasitically in the radical movement.

THE ECONOMIC BASIS OF TOTALITARIANISM. By Jonathan Ayres. The secret of post-Marxian capitalist economics.

NO ESCAPE FROM ANTI-SEMITISM? By Casper Baeldt.

LENIN'S THEORY OF CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS. By Sprenger.

THEY SAY WE CAN'T AVOID FASCISM. By Integer.

Revealing articles on Spain, Russia, China and Mexico by Roberto and others. Latest books.

Sub Rates: $1.00 for 8 issues; $1.50 for 12 issues

Friedrich Engels' **WHAT SHALL WE DO IN CASE OF A WORLD WAR (1892)?** will be forwarded to all asking for a specimen copy.

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW
P. O. Box 44, Sta. O, New York, N. Y.

LIVING MARXISM

Consciously opposes all forms of sectarianism. The sectarian confuses the interest of his group, whether it is a party or a union, with the interest of the class. It is the purpose of *Living Marxism* to discover the actual proletarian tendencies in their backward organizational and theoretical forms; to effect a discussion of them beyond the boundaries of their organizations and current dogmatics; to facilitate their fusion into unified action; and thus to help them achieve real significance.

In the current issue: *The Jitterbugs—Union Unity?—The Concentration Camp Grows: a Critique of Revolutionary Tactics —Collectivization in Spain—Marxism and Marginal Utility Economics—Book reviews.*

SINGLE ISSUE 15 cents—8 ISSUES $1.00

Order sample copies from:

LIVING MARXISM, P.O. Box 5343, Chicago, Ill.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SEVEN

Edited by Nicholas Moore, 86 Chesterton Rd., Cambridge, England
Published by John Goodland, 8 Inglebert St., London E. C. I.

ONE SHILLING **NO. 4** **FEBRUARY 1939**

KAY BOYLE—Poem: "A World Tour"
DYLAN THOMAS—"An Adventure"
LAWRENCE DURRELL—Six Poems
ANAIS NIN—"Mischa and the Analyst"
ALFRED PERLES—"The Gay Source"
ANTONIA WHITE—Review of Perles' "Le Quatuor en Re Majeur"
ROBERT YOUNG—Pasternak: "The High Malady" —a Translation

Poems by: HENRY TREECE, J. F. HENDRY, PAUL POTTS, ROY FULLER, MARY WOODMAN, GERVASE STEWART, RAYNER HEPPENSTALL

Prose by: PARKER TYLER, JAMES LAUGHLIN IV, CHARLES HENRI FORD

Yearly Subscription: 4/4 ($1, 40 Francs) post free. Distributed in America by the Gotham Book Mart, New York.

TWICE · A · YEAR

DOROTHY NORMAN, Editor **Asst. Editor, MARY LESCAZE**

A New Semi-Annual Journal of
LITERATURE — THE ARTS — CIVIL LIBERTIES

Spring-Summer, No. 2, 1939: Among Contributors and Contents:
MARCEL PROUST, A Story (Heretofore unpublished in English
WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS, A study of the Artist
Fascism:
HERBERT S. SELIGMAN, Challenge of Anti-Semitism
FRANK KINGDON, Challenge of Nazi Persecution of Christianity
JOHN MARIN, Notes, Reproductions, Letters
ELIOT PORTER, Photograph
JAMES LAUGHLIN IV, Poems
Architecture Section—Civil Liberties Section

INTRODUCTORY OFFER

TWICE A YEAR PRESS, 509 Madison Avenue, New York City
I enclose:
$1.75 ($2.25 foreign*) for a year's subscription to TWICE A YEAR, beginning with issue No..... Clothbound $3.75 (*4.25).... $1.00
($1.25 foreign*) for single issue No..... Clothbound $2.00 (*2.25)....
Name.....
Address.....
ORDER DIRECT OR FROM ANY BOOKSELLER

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED